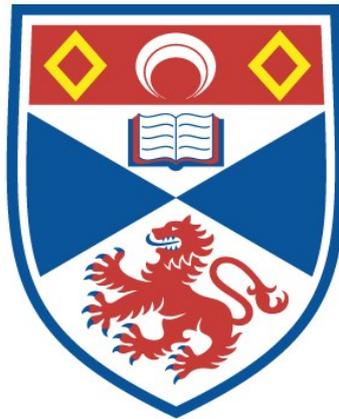


**COALMINERS' HOUSING IN FIFE :
COMPANY HOUSING AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN
FIFE MINING COMMUNITIES, 1870-1930**

Veronica Anne O'Halloran

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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in
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1870-1930**

A thesis
by
Veronica Anne O'Halloran B.A., M.A.

Presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Dept. of Geography and Geology
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September 1992



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Abstract

Fife coal-owners owned their workers houses and controlled the processes of housing provision and allocation. They were both employers and landlords. As a result the spheres of home and work were inextricably linked. This thesis examines the nature of the social relations arising from this "tied" relationship in the light of both local and national, political, economic and social developments, between 1870 and 1930. The themes of deference, paternalism, community, socialisation and social control, and the residual effects of pre-existing social relations, particularly pre-industrial relations of production, are explored.

The empirical research concentrates upon the analysis of two coal companies in particular; the Fife Coal Company Ltd. and the Wemyss Coal Company. These companies operated coal mines in contrasting geographical locations; the former throughout inland west Fife and the latter along coastal south-east Fife. Each company built rows of colliers' houses in close proximity to the mines.

At the beginning of the period housing for coal-miners was provided, not by speculative builders on the open market, but, by the coal-owners through their company architects and sub-contractors. Houses were provided as part of the employment contract as a means of attracting and maintaining the workforce. By the end of the period, the State, through the agency of local authorities, was the principal provider of working class housing in mining communities; coal companies had withdrawn from the housing market. The thesis attempts to explain this process in terms of changing social relations of production.

For my parents

Mary M. Griffin and Joe O'Halloran

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Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
Reasons for this study.	1
Mining mines and housing miners.	3
Data sources.	9
Structure and organisation of the study.	11

Part One

<i>Chapter 1 Towards company housing</i>	15
1.1. Introduction.	15
1.2. Industrial tied housing.	17
1.3. "Harmonious living".	20
1.4. Pre-industrial relations of production and miners' housing.	25
1.5. Transformation of the Scottish coal-mining industry.	31
1.5.1. The example of Fordell village, Fife.	36
1.6. Different patterns of social relations.	42
1.7. Conclusion.	46
 <i>Chapter 2 The development of the Fife and Scottish coal-mining industry</i>	 50
2.1. Introduction.	50
2.2. Cycles of prosperity in nineteenth century coal-mining.	52
2.3. The origins and history of coal production in Fife.	60
2.4. Industrial relations in the Scottish coal-mining industry in the nineteenth century.	64
2.5. Labour relations 1900-1926.	72
2.6. The union and Fife miners.	82
2.7. Conclusion.	91
 <i>Chapter 3 Housing legislation and government involvement in miners' housing</i>	 96
3.1. Introduction.	96
3.2. Towards Government intervention.	97
3.3. Scottish local government.	100
3.4. Problems of jurisdiction and responsibility in mining districts.	103
3.5. The Local Government Board and miners' housing.	111
3.6. Post World War I housing legislation and miners' housing.	120
3.7. Conclusion.	127

Chapter 4	Mineral leases and coal company housing	135
4.1.	Introduction.	135
4.2.	Land tenure and Scottish housing.	136
4.3.	Mineral leases and colliery housing.	138
4.4.	Mineral leases and miners' housing in the twentieth century.	145
4.5.	The Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease 1914-16.	147
4.5.1.	Negotiation.	149
4.5.2.	Valuation.	156
4.6.	Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease 1927-29.	165
4.7.	The return of houses upon expiry of the lease; the case of Blairenbathie Estate, 1928.	169
4.7.1	Blairenbathie Cottages, Blairadam.	170
4.7.2	Miners' houses at Keltyhead and Church St. Kelty.	172
4.8.	Conclusion.	176

Part Two

Review and introduction.	186
--------------------------	-----

Chapter 5	Power and control; paternalism, deference and social relations	191
5.1.	Introduction.	191
5.2.	Power and social relations.	193
5.3.	Social control and socialisation.	194
5.4.	Paternalism and deference.	200
5.5.	Community and neighbourhood.	205
5.6.	Conclusion.	212

Chapter 6	Social relations in Fife mining communities	214
6.1.	Introduction.	214
6.2.	Community strength.	216
6.3.	Cycles of power and powerlessness.	219
6.4.	Paternalism and deference in Fife mining communities.	224
6.4.1.	Henderson of Fordell.	226
6.4.2.	Wemyss of Wemyss.	229
6.4.3.	Paternalism of late nineteenth century coal foundations.	234
6.5.	Conclusion.	237

Chapter 7	Colliers and company housing	239
7.1.	Introduction.	239
7.2.	Housing provision in mining communities.	240
7.3.	Coal company employees and tied housing.	247
7.4.	The imposition of rent.	250
7.5.	Concessions to the old, retired, widowed and ill.	259
7.6.	War widows.	272
7.7.	Gradual withdrawal of concessions.	278
7.8.	Conclusion.	282

Part Three

Review and introduction.	292
--------------------------	-----

Chapter 8	From deference to antagonism; housing conditions and social relations in coal-mining communities	294
------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------

8.1	Introduction.	294
8.2.	Towards and independent enquiry; agitation by miners and their supporters.	296
8.2.1.	First deputation, 1892.	299
8.2.2.	Second and third deputations, 1909.	301
8.2.3.	Fourth and fifth deputations, 1911.	303
8.3.	Towards and independent enquiry; action taken by the Scottish Office and the coal-owners' response.	310
8.4.	Conclusion.	316

Chapter 9	"Treated as miners and not as men": The Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland, rural and urban, 1912-17	320
------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------

9.1.	Introduction.	320
9.2.	The Commission's findings.	324
9.3.	Overcrowding in Fife coal-mining communities.	339
9.4.	Rent.	353
9.5.	Royal Commission; summary and recommendations.	359
9.6.	Conclusion.	363

Chapter 10	Coal company housing and miners' welfare in post World War I Scotland	366
10.1.	Introduction.	366
10.2.	The 1919 Coal Industry Commission; an indictment of Scottish coal-owners.	371
10.3.	The 1925 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry.	394
10.4.	Catering for the welfare of miners; pit-head baths 1917-1930.	401
10.5.	The Fife Coal Company Ltd. and pit-head baths.	411
10.6.	Improvements to houses at Leven, 1927-1935.	417
10.7.	Conclusion.	428
	 Conclusion	 433
	 Bibliography	 442
	Primary sources.	442
	Secondary sources.	448

Illustrations

Map Coaltowns of South West Fife.	14
Plate 1 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Approach Row, East Wemyss, leading to the Michael Pit.	Between 6 & 7
Plate 2 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Methilhill, Denbeath, built between 1902 and 1908.	Between 6 & 7
Plate 3 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Wall Street, Denbeath, built in 1913.	Between 14 & 15
Plate 4 Fife Coal Company houses at Viewforth Cottages, Valleyfield, built in 1914-15.	Between 14 & 15
Plate 5 Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company houses at Auchterderran Road, Lochgelly, built in 1900.	Between 134 & 135
Plate 6 Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company houses at Cardenden, built in 1925.	Between 134 & 135
Plate 7 Fife Coal Company houses at Waverley Street, Lochore, built in 1909.	Between 169 & 170
Plate 8 Fife Coal Company houses at Earls Row, Kelty, built in 1914.	Between 169 & 170
Plate 9 Randolph Wemyss Memorial Hospital, Wellesley Road, Methil, built in 1909.	Between 231 & 232
Plate 10 Wemyss School of Needlecraft.	Between 231 & 232
Plate 11 Post World War I home for retired miners, East Wemyss.	Between 234 & 235
Plate 12 Post World War I home for retired miners, East Wemyss.	Between 234 & 235

Tables

Table 1.1. Colliery Company Houses 1913.	49
Table 2.1. Fife Collieries and Coal-owners in 1874.	94
Table 3.1. Housing, Health and Sanitation Legislation 1855-1915.	130
Table 3.2. Legislation Pertaining to Scottish Housing 1890-1930.	132
Table 4.1. Kelty and Donibristle Colliery Houses and Gardens 1927.	180
Table 4.2. Houses at Kelty and it's environs referred to in the lease.	181
Table 4.3. Alexander Todd's Valuation of Miners' Housing at Kelty and Donibristle.	182
Table 4.4. Valuation of houses at Kelty and Donibristle belonging to the Earl of Moray and taken over by the Fife Coal Company.	185
Table 7.1. Women paying rent for Wemyss Coal Company houses at West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Methil and Buckhaven.	286
Table 7.2. Number of known widows (including war widows) occupying Wemyss Coal Company houses at West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Methil and Buckhaven.	286
Table 7.3. War Widows 1919.	287
Table 7.4. Houses built between 1901 and 1914: number and rent at 30 January 1924.	288
Table 7.5. Houses built between 1914 and 1924: number and rent at 30 January 1924.	289
Table 7.6. Fife Coal Company Houses 1908.	290
Table 10.1. Houses Built by Colliery Companies and Private Enterprise.	431
Table 10.2. Houses Built by Local Authorities in Mining Areas of Fife under State Assisted Schemes.	432

Abbreviations in the text.

APS; Acts of the Parliament of Scotland.

CB; Coal Board.

c.; Chapter

Cd., Cmd., Cmnd.; Command Number.

DD; Development Department.

Eliz; Elizabeth II.

Geo; George V.

GD; Gifts and Deposits; private papers in the Scottish Records Office.

Gov; Government.

GRH; General Register House, Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh.

LGB; Local Government Board.

MFGB; Miners Federation of Great Britain.

M.P.; Member of Parliament.

NCB; National Coal Board.

OS; Ordnance Survey

p.; page, **pps.;** pages.

Para(s).; Paragraph(s).

R.C.; Royal Commission.

RHP; Register House Plan.

SRO; Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh.

Vict; Victoria.

VR; Valuation Roll.

W.C.; Water Closet.

WRH; West Register House, Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh.

Introduction

In bygone days, communities were established near the scene of industry and prospered while they served their purpose. Then they passed away leaving little more than a pang of regret in the hearts of those who knew their joys and sorrows.¹

Reasons for this study.

Treating company housing merely as an example of working class housing as a whole is unsatisfactory as it inevitably neglects the social significance of company housing in its local setting and also ignores its role as an indicator of change in social relations in a particular working environment. That this has been the trend in commentaries and histories of working class housing and the coal mining industry is perhaps surprising when the importance of company housing to many government investigations into the living and working conditions of the working class is considered. It is doubly surprising in the context of miners' history, and when the impact of the struggle over coal miners' housing on national housing legislation is taken into account. Had it not been for pressure from the Scottish Miners' Federation, the 1917 Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland might never have been appointed. A handful of scholars have attempted to examine the social implications and ramifications of coal company housing in particular localities: Campbell's book on the miners of Lanarkshire,² Daunton's article

¹ William Reid, Chairman of the Scottish Division of the National Coal Board, cited in the Introduction to Holman, R., (1952) *Behind the Diamond Panes: The Story of a Fife Mining Community*.

² Campbell, A. B., (1979) *The Lanarkshire Miners. A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775-1874*. John Donald, Edinburgh.

on the Great Northern Coalfield,³ Melling's article on the west of Scotland,⁴ and Hickey's book on the miners of the Ruhr in Germany.⁵

Existing published work does not consider company housing in the east Scottish coalfield of Fife, Clackmannan and the Lothians. Coal company provision of housing for workers was an integral part of the Fife coal-mining industry. While coal-mining no longer takes place in the parts of Fife considered in this thesis, many of the workers' houses built by Fife coal companies survive today. They can be found dotted around the Fife countryside in small self-contained villages such as East Wemyss, West Wemyss, the Coaltown of Wemyss or hidden in the larger west Fife towns such as Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly, Kelty and Lumphinnans (see map p. 14). While most of the villages and towns in south west Fife still contain some miners houses, many miners' houses were demolished in the aftermath of the 1919 Housing Act, or when, after the Second World War and following nationalisation of the industry, the NCB erected new houses for Fife coal-miners. The mining village of Glencraig in west Fife for example, has completely disappeared. Many of the houses in the Wemyss villages are of much higher architectural standard than those in west Fife. They have recently been taken over by housing associations and private developers for renovation and sale as small, fully equipped residences, ideal for commuters to Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh. Company houses at Coaltown of

³ Daunton, M. J., (1980) *Miners Housing in South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield 1860-1914*. *International Review of Social History*, 25 pps. 143-175.

⁴Melling, J., (1981) "Employers, Industrial Housing and the Evolution of Company Welfare Policies in Britain's Heavy Industry: West Scotland 1870-1920." *International Review of Social History*, 26, pps. 255-301.

⁵ Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany. The Miners of the Ruhr*. Clarendon, Oxford.

Wemyss, such as those in Plantation Row and Lochhead Crescent, built in the local vernacular style, are of such high quality that they have been given conservation status.

The very survival of so many miners' houses in Fife is a testament to their importance to the locality. For this reason alone the study of miners' housing in Fife, its importance to labour relations between coal-owners and colliers, and its place in the history of housing provision for workers is important. However, for a fuller understanding of the regional housing situation and working environment of Fife colliers, they need to be analysed in the wider context of the economic development of the Scottish coal-mining industry. This study of company housing in Fife mining communities between the 1870s and the 1930s is primarily concerned with change in social relations over the period. Social change took place against the background of the social and economic history of coal mining and of working class housing in Scotland. The active agents of social change were the miners, the coal companies and the government. Each of these three agents had its own history which entwined with, and influenced that of the other two. The social processes of paternalism, deference, power and social control were the strands which linked these agencies in their interaction; company housing was central to the struggle for control of the workplace and home and was an integral part of nineteenth century management of the industry.

Mining mines and housing miners

During the latter half of the nineteenth century rich coal seams were discovered in Fife, in the Cowdenbeath Lochgelly area, and in the vicinity of Wemyss. Older seams continued to be exploited, but to much greater

depths. New mines and deep level working gave new life to Fife villages, (see map of Coaltowns in south west Fife p. 14). Coal-mining superseded weaving as the dominant industry. Prior to this coal-mining had employed only a fraction of those engaged in farming or linen manufacture. In 1874 there were forty five coal-mining companies operating in the county employing over 4,500 people⁶ (see table 2.1.). By 1914 there were over 30,000 miners employed in Fife alone.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there were eleven coal mining firms in Fife who provided housing for their workers. These were the coal companies of Balgonie, Blairadam, Bowhill, Dysart, Donibristle, Fordell, Fife, Wemyss, Spowart, Browne and the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company.⁷ These companies incorporated different strands of industrial development, with contrasting origins and organisation. Some were recent foundations, like the Fife Coal Company and the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company, both limited companies inaugurated in the 1870s. Others, the coal companies of Wemyss and Fordell for example, while also limited companies, had evolved from long established family run firms that had worked small collieries in the same locations for several generations. The new foundations were aggressively managerial, in contrast to the older small coal companies who retained production methods and work practices that had changed little since the early nineteenth century.

The expansion of mining in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century and

⁶ Report of the Inspectors of Mines, to Her Majesty's Secretary of State, for the year 1875, HMSO, London, 1875, pps. 185-204.

⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners' Association: 1899 Report on house rents paid by miners and the tenants share of taxes paid thereon.

the resultant influx of miners and their families, created a demand for living accommodation. For example between 1891 and 1911 in the parish of Wemyss alone, the population rose from 10,000 to 23,000 people. Newcomers, attracted to Fife by jobs in the coal-mines, came from Lanarkshire, Ireland and the former shale mines in the Lothians. Although they would not have been raised with any sense of identity with the locality, they would, had they previously worked as coal-miners or as agricultural workers elsewhere in Scotland, have been familiar with the tradition of employers providing for the welfare of their workers.

The response of Fife coal companies to the increase in the workforce was to erect new houses close to the mines. They were keen to attract and maintain workers and in the absence of alternative agencies of provision they had little choice but to build workers houses. Their motivation, therefore was primarily economic. It will be shown in the dissertation that in order to facilitate the reproduction of a stable workforce coal companies invested in their employees by providing for all of their welfare needs.

The houses that each company built were provided either through direct financing by the companies or through the purchase, improvement or leasing of dwellings already in existence. Local contractors were usually employed to erect new houses while in some instances this work was overseen by company architects. This housing was built along what had become traditional lines and varied in size from one to five rooms. The majority however were two apartment single storey cottages erected close to the pits and with no inside running water. In old houses two or three tenants shared a water closet; usually a dry closet or midden privy at the end of the garden.

In the 1880s Randolph Gordon Erskine Wemyss commenced the expansion of the Wemyss family's coal mining operations in the barony by working the Dysart main seam. The Wemyss Coal Company's commitment to workers' housing was evident in the employment in the mid-1870s of Alexander Todd as Clerk of Works. He worked for the family until his death in 1916, when his son Stewart took over responsibility for housing. Care was taken in the design and layout of Wemyss coal company housing as Randolph Wemyss was keenly interested in architecture. Alexander Todd designed houses for the company at the newly opened pits in the 1880s and 1890s, including the company properties at East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss and Methilhill. The houses at East Wemyss were built to accommodate miners following the opening of the Rosie pit in 1886 and the Michael pit in 1898.⁸ Sixty cottages were initially built at Approach Row beside the mine [Plate 1] followed by further rows of miners cottages at Approach Terrace, Randolph Street, and St. Mary's Terrace. Todd also designed houses at Cowley Street and Forth Street Methilhill, built between 1902-08 [Plate 2]. In 1913 the company constructed thirty nine two roomed houses, and forty nine three roomed houses at Wall Street Denbeath [Plate 3]. In 1914 they built 63 two roomed houses with a scullery, larder and water closet at Methilhill. By then the Wemyss Coal Company owned over one thousand properties in the Coaltown, East and West Wemyss, Methilhill and Buckhaven in south east Fife.

While the coal company housing surviving in the barony of Wemyss are the most architecturally appealing, many more traditional miners cottages were built in the but-and-ben and single-end style by other Fife coal companies. For example, the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company, founded in

⁸ 1986, *East Wemyss Village Walkabout*, Wemyss Environmental Education Centre, p. 17.

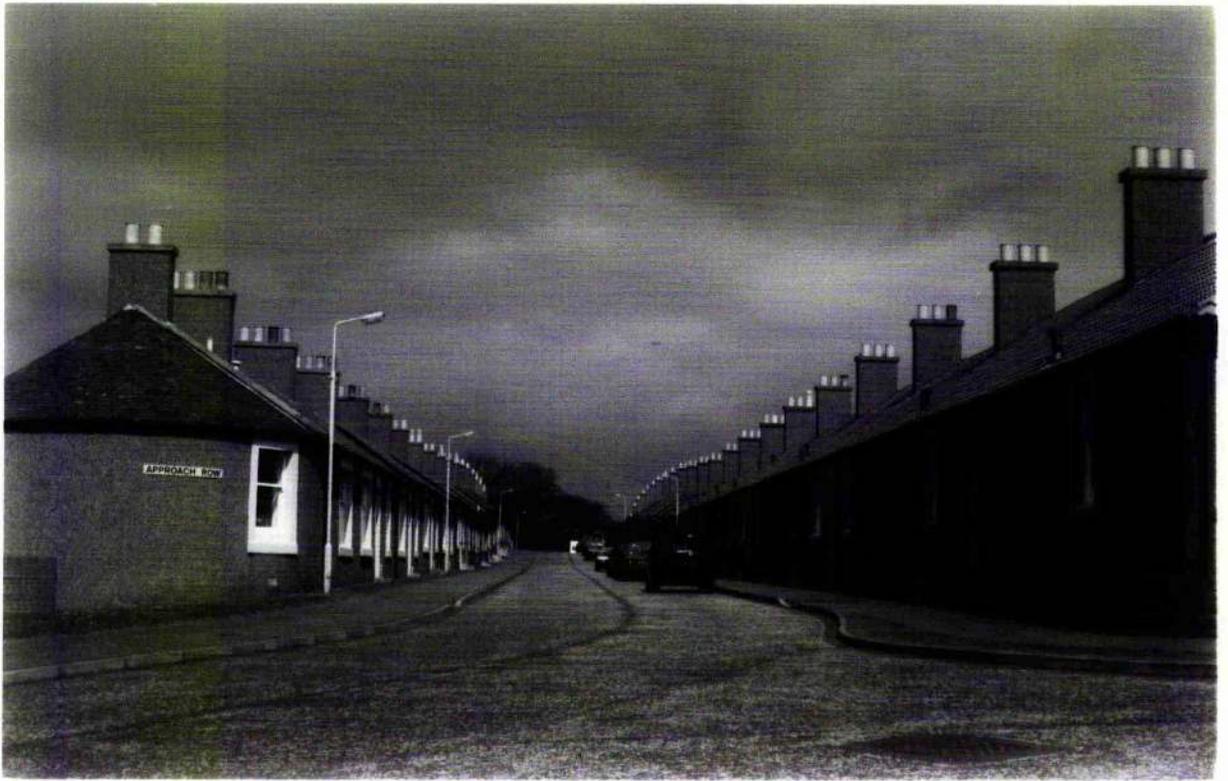


Plate 1 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Approach Row, East Wemyss, leading to the Michael Pit.



Plate 2 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Methilhill, Denbeath, built between 1902 and 1908.

1850, erected houses only in west Fife; in the vicinity of Lochgelly, Dundonald and Raith. These included several rows of houses at Lumphinnans built in the 1850s and 1860s, forty six houses built in 1900 in Lochgelly, and 25 houses built at Cardenden in 1925 [Plates 5 and 6].

The Bowhill Coal Company operated in Fife between 1894 and 1909. According to the company's annual report to shareholders in 1900, eighty new houses had been built, fifty four of which were already occupied.⁹ The company then owned 646 houses and a further 92 were leased from the land proprietors.¹⁰ With the liquidation of the company in 1909 all of the houses were taken over by the Fife Coal Company.

By the time the Fife Coal Company, founded in 1872, had its third board meeting, it had been decided to build a row of houses for miners a little south of the village of Kelty.¹¹ More houses were built by the company in the late 1870s to accommodate miners close to its new pits around Leven. Most of the company's new houses were built between the 1890s and the First World War; at Blairadam, Lochore, Ballingry, Scoonie and Valleyfield. The company built the village of Lochore in 1902 specifically to house miners and in 1909 the village was extended with the addition of sixteen three apartment, and thirty two two apartment houses at Waverley Street [Plate 7]. In 1914 two blocks of miners dwellings, each of two or three rooms

⁹ SRO GRH GD/571/4; Report to Shareholders at Sixth Annual General Meeting 1900.

¹⁰ SRO GRH GD/571/4; Draft letter of acknowledgement by Fife Coal Company to Wishart and Sanderson, re. delivery of Assignations by Bowhill Coal Company and liquidator.

¹¹ Muir, A, (1958) *The Fife Coal Company Ltd., A Short History* , The Fife Coal Company, Leven, p. 2.

and furnished with a bathroom were constructed at Valleyfield [Plate 4]. In the same year another eight two apartment houses were erected at Earls Row Kelty [Plate 8], and a further 22 two unit cottages at Valleyforth Kelty.

The standard and quality of accommodation in coal-mining communities improved during the period under review. Early houses were usually one roomed with an outside w.c. shared between several neighbours. New houses had two or three rooms, and all had an inside toilet and scullery. Improvements resulted from a heightened awareness of social conditions by employer and tenant and were bought about by pressure from the coal-miners and from the government (see Chapters 3 and 8). From 1909 onwards the government dictated housing standards. While colliery company house building continued to the late 1920s and interest appeared consistent, it must be borne in mind that the number of new houses declined over the years. The construction of coal company housing was at its height in Fife in the years between 1890 and 1914. Following the 1919 Housing Act and the subsequent legislation in 1923, private enterprise construction of working class housing was subsidised by grants from the State. For example, the post World War One houses at Methilhill, commenced in 1919 by the Wemyss Coal Company were augmented by local authority housing in 1924-25. As late as 1924-25 the Wemyss Coal Company was still building workers houses, (two hundred and thirty, three and four roomed houses, erected at Methilhill, each with a kitchen scullery and bathroom) but by then with the aid of government subsidies under the 1923 Housing Act. The Fife Coal Company also erected houses after the First World War with the aid of government grants. In 1919 four two-storey dwellings at Moray Bank Cottages Kelty were built. In 1924-25 the company constructed 102 three apartment houses at Montrose Street Lochore and 20 three room houses at Shielto Road Kelty. It will be shown in the thesis that

after the First World War the impetus to build houses for workers came from the government and not from the coal companies. The motivation for coal company construction of workers' houses after World War I was largely political; a means of defending the private management of the industry and deflecting union demands for nationalisation.

Data sources

The thesis is part reconstruction, part description, part narration and part analysis. It represents the author's interpretation of events in Fife mining communities between 1870 and 1930. The interpretation has been constructed from primary data, and from contemporary commentary and latter day historical texts. The secondary texts are referenced in the body of the thesis. The primary sources used in the study were (1) records housed in the Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh; in particular coal company records (DD files), Coal Board records (CB files), private papers (GD files), valuation rolls (VR) and house plans (RHP); (2) government papers including relevant legislation on housing and coal mining, and Reports of the Royal Commissions of 1917, 1919 and 1925; and (3) Local histories and newspapers. A bibliography of the primary and secondary sources used is given at the end of the thesis.

The most important of the sources was the coal company records kept at West Register House Edinburgh. Those of the Fife Coal Company were particularly valuable as they contained copies of correspondence with other coal companies, company solicitors, the local authority, politicians, the Scottish Office and land proprietors, as well as internal memoranda to employees in the firm's several offices. Wemyss Coal Company documents also proved very useful as the company kept detailed rent books, wage

books and records of concessions in rent to the old, widowed, retired and ill. The next most important source of information was the Scottish Office, Local Government Board and Coal Board papers also kept at West Register House. These provided statistical information on housing in mining districts, including evidence collected for the Royal Commissions on the Coal Industry held in 1919 and 1925. They also include copies of correspondence between the Scottish Office and other branches of the Civil Service, correspondence with coal companies, records on the deputations received from representatives of the Miners' Federation, and miscellaneous papers on miners' housing including questions asked in Parliament and numerous newspapers cuttings. The private papers kept at General Register Houses provided invaluable evidence on mining in Fife in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Valuation Rolls, also at General Register House, were useful as a means of locating miners' housing and ascertaining the owners of the properties. The Register House Plans located in West Register House were the only records that proved disappointing. In most cases the plans were extracts from OS 1/2500 showing the location of houses just before nationalisation of the mines, instead of architectural plans and elevations of the properties.

Government papers, in particular the Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban published in 1917 and the Reports of the Coal Industry Commissions of 1919 and 1925 gave detailed and vivid accounts of the situation in Fife mining communities. In particular the evidence presented by the Miners Federation and the Scottish Coal-owners Association to the Commissions illustrate the extent of the deterioration in relations between coal companies and colliers. Housing and coal mining legislation place events in Fife between 1870 and 1930 in the political and economic context of the day

while local newspapers and contemporary accounts of life in Fife mining villages tell the story from the point of view of the miners and their families.

Structure and organisation of the study.

The thesis is arranged in three parts. The work begins (Part I) by charting the historical context and outlining the changes in the mining industry and company housing provision in Fife between 1870 and 1930. Part II describes the social relations of production associated with mining during the period and explains how paternalism and deference, power and control were manifested in Fife mining communities. Part III outlines the deterioration of relations between Fife coal-owners and colliers and explains how the government took over responsibility for the provision of colliers' housing.

It will be shown in Part I that the origins of housing provision for colliers lay in pre-industrial relations of production. Houses were provided as part of the contract of work from the earliest years of coal extraction. Collier serfdom will be introduced in Chapter 1 as it was fundamental to social relations in Fife mining communities and contributed to the cohesion of work and community relations. Housing provision for the small mining community of Fordell in Fife will be described and the chapter also introduces different patterns of social relations across several British coalfields. Chapter 2 explains the political and economic background to the study. It gives an introductory account of (1) the Scottish coal-mining industry, (2) changes in the organisation and management of coal companies, and (3) industrial relations between miners and coal companies. These influenced the development of the Scottish coal-mining industry and thereby the provision of company housing. They also placed latent pre-industrial relations of production under severe strain in the early twentieth

century. In addition to reviewing legislation pertinent to Scotland, Chapter 3 highlights the aspects of housing legislation relevant to miners housing and the problems associated with the implementation of housing acts in Scottish mining districts.

Chapter 4 leads from the general issues affecting coal company housing to specific issues associated with the provision of such housing. The chapter explains how workers housing was provided under mineral leases. Examples of twentieth century leasing agreements in Fife are given and these illustrate the political and economic pressures upon coal company housing at the time. Neither party wished to be responsible for the condition of workers' housing when the lease ended. It is interesting that in dealing with housing very little concern was shown for the occupants of the properties. Instead the interests of property and capital were paramount.

In Part II an attempt is made to explain, understand and interpret social relations in Fife during the same period. Chapter 5 outlines the theoretical basis to the thesis and introduces the concepts of power, social control, socialisation, deference, paternalism, community and neighbourhood. Operational definitions are given for each of these concepts. Chapter 6 illustrates how paternalism and deference were fostered in Fife by long established family firms and late nineteenth century coal foundations, and demonstrates the links between paternalism and control, and between deference and dependence. Chapter 7 continues to trace the manifestations of paternalism in Fife, while also highlighting those aspects of the relationship under economic and social pressure in the years following World War I. The chapter considers the landlord/tenant relationship in mining communities; rent and concessions to the old, retired, widowed and ill; and finally the gradual withdrawal of concessions.

The third and final Part outlines the consequence of social change; the destruction, collapse and replacement of redundant social relations of production in Fife mining communities. In chapter 8 an account is given of agitation by the Scottish Miners' Federation for improvements to housing conditions in coal mining communities, followed by details of action taken by the Scottish Office in response. Chapter 9 considers the 1917 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Class in Scotland, the result of agitation outlined in Chapter 8. Chapter 10 deals with the Scottish coal-mining industry after the First World War. Details of the Coal Industry Commissions of 1919 and 1925 are given, together with an account of the attack on the management of the industry by the Miners' Federation and the defence presented by Scottish coal-owners.

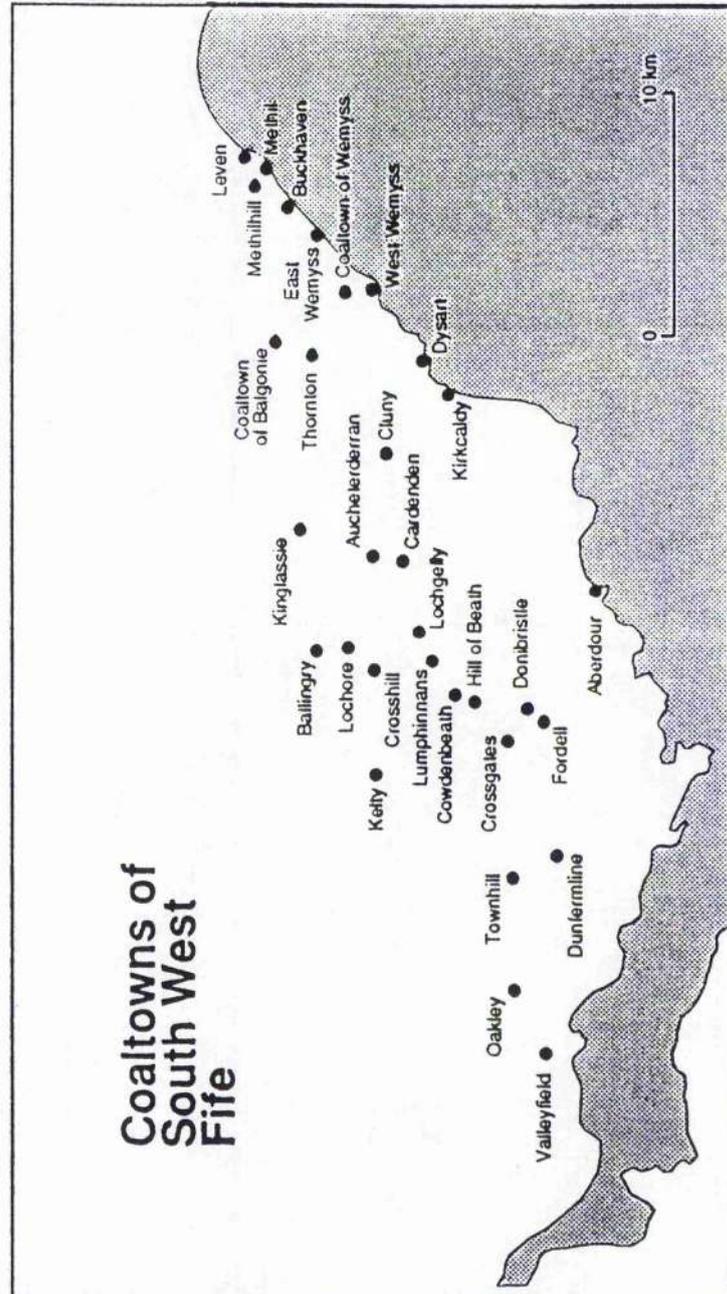




Plate 3 Wemyss Coal Company houses at Wall Street, Denbeath. 39 houses with 2 rooms and scullery and 49 houses with 3 rooms and scullery, built in 1913.

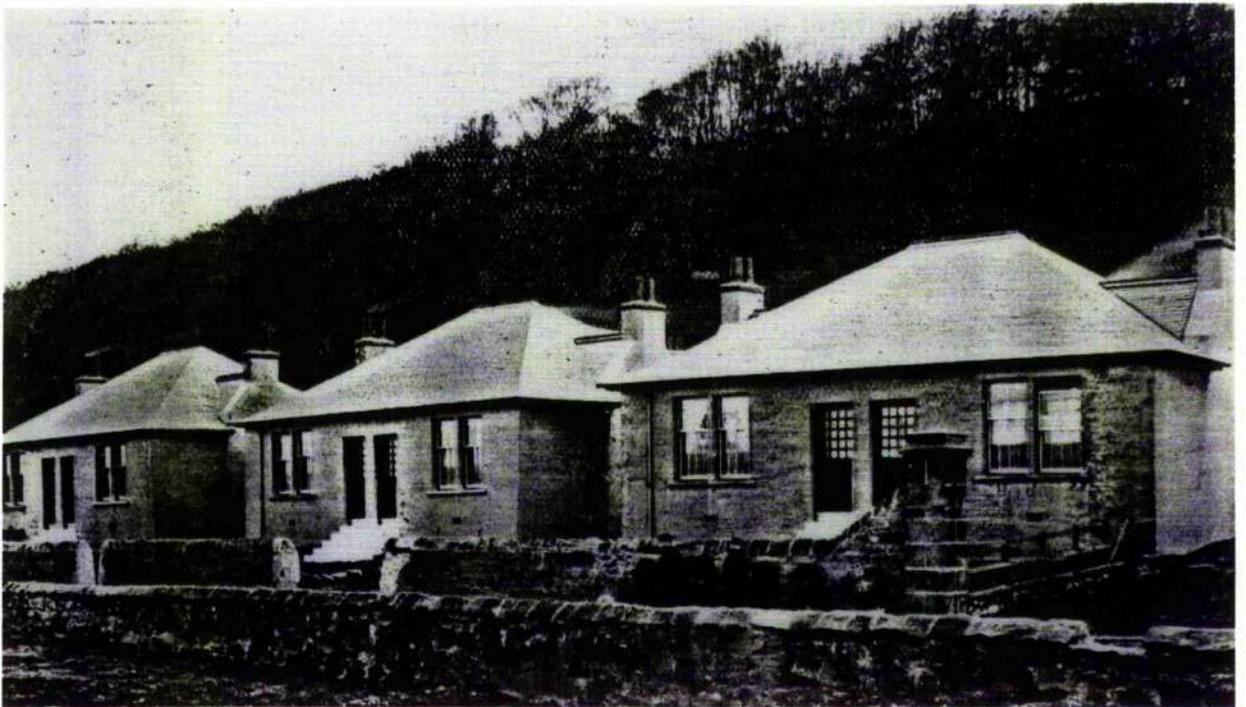


Plate 4 Fife Coal Company houses at Viewforth Cottages, Valleyfield. 22 houses with 2 rooms, scullery and W.C., built in 1914-15.

Chapter 1

Towards company housing

"An adequate housing stock is an obvious necessity for securing a labour force, while the standard of housing accommodation is a significant determinant of labour productivity."¹

1.1. Introduction

Industrialists, manufacturers, company owners and employers all played a prominent role in the provision of housing for workers. When taken on a national scale however, and when compared with speculative urban provision of working class housing, the amount of company built housing in Britain has always been small. Studies of company housing have been patchy and have concentrated for the most part on only some aspects of provision, often reflecting the particular interests of individual authors. Enid Gauldie for instance, in a seminal study, examined company housing in the context of the national provision of working class housing². She recognised the need for a general history of housing against which local situations could be analysed and better understood. Her work is widely regarded as path-breaking and provided one of the earliest comprehensive histories of the housing of the working class in Britain.

¹ Daunton, M.J.,(1983) *House and Home in the Victorian City. Working Class Housing 1850-1914*. Edward Arnold London, p. 178.

²Gauldie, E., (1984) *Cruel Habitations. A History of Working Class Housing 1780-1918*. George Allen and Unwin, London.

Gauldie suggests that the tradition of building houses for workers, at least on a large scale, became increasingly uncommon after the 1850s.³ While it is undoubtedly true that "large scale" provision declined in the late nineteenth century, this assertion should not be taken to imply that company provision ceased entirely by the mid nineteenth century. Nor should the importance of such housing be underestimated. While always accounting for a small proportion of the national supply, the importance of company housing lies not so much in the quantity or quality of the dwellings themselves, but rather in the social aspects of their provision.

Houses are physical structures, designed and built as a result of particular social and economic needs. In the words of Bourne a house is "a physical entity, a social artefact, an economic good, a capital stock, a status symbol and at times a political "hot-potato".⁴ Houses have both a physical presence and an economic significance and should be studied and interpreted in the context of culture and society.⁵ Coal-miners houses, during the period of study, were important elements in both the social and physical fabric of the local society. The aspect of housing being examined here is the social behaviour of coal-owners and miners that was embodied in the provision of company housing in the changing cultural and physical environment of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Scotland.

It is argued in this thesis that surviving examples of coal company housing in Fife represent relict features of a social order that prevailed from the

³Gauldie, E., *Op. cit.* p. 188

⁴Bourne, L.S., (1981) *The Geography of Housing*. Edward Arnold, London p. 13.

⁵Daunton, M.J., *Op. cit.* p. 4.

earliest days of industrial exploitation until well into the twentieth century. The power that Scottish coal companies gained through the provision of housing and neighbourhood services (churches, schools, libraries, recreation facilities) for their workers complemented their role as employers. The provision of housing remained central to managerial policy until (1) the government took over responsibility for working class housing and (2) the management of the coal industry was taken out of private hands.

The purpose of this chapter is to present an introductory historical background to the provision of company housing in Britain and to examine in a general and preliminary manner the motivation of employers in investing in such housing. Chapter two follows with a general economic history of the Scottish coal-mining industry and introduces the economic and political factors that influenced coal company housing provision between 1870 and 1930. Chapter three reviews housing legislation relevant to the period of Scottish history being studied, while Chapter four explains how workers houses were erected under mineral leases. These four chapters form the first part of the thesis which is designed to provide the background to a more detailed investigation of company housing provision explored in Parts II and III.

1.2. Industrial "tied" housing.

It can be argued that the economic welfare of an industrial enterprise was largely determined by the social welfare of the workforce and by good working relations between managers and employers. Financial investment in housing was an investment not only in housing stock, but also in the maintenance of labour productivity through workplace stability. The direct provision of housing by employers helped to sustain a stable and sedentary

workforce. It also guaranteed the replacement of the labour force by encouraging the children of miners to take up employment in the same enterprise as their forebears. Company housing was therefore an important element of social relations of production and continued so as long as productive and skilled labourers remained valuable and useful to the enterprise.

Two factors motivated manufacturers and industrial entrepreneurs in the erection of working class housing. These were (1) economic necessity and (2) the absence of alternative means of provision. Many early industrial enterprises were located in remote areas and in the absence of alternative provision, employers were obliged at least initially to build homes for their workers. Individual landowners commissioned contractors to build houses as cheaply as possible and as close as possible to the workplace. Whether other agencies of housing provision, such as speculative builders, followed the companies into an area frequently depended upon the degree of isolation of the enterprise and whether or not the location attracted other sources of employment and hence increased demand for housing. Employer provision of housing, tended to predominate in areas where a company monopolised the labour market. The provision of housing by employers for a stable and sedentary workforce over a long period of time can accurately be described as "company housing".

Accommodation "tied" to particular jobs predated industrialisation of the late eighteenth century. Prior to industrialisation when manufacturing was a local business and carried out on a small scale, the size of industries, their "undeveloped" nature and the small numbers employed therein, facilitated a close relationship between workers and employers. In these circumstances agricultural labourers, migrant workers, textile and colliery workers were

typically provided with dwellings by employers.

But even when rapid industrial expansion occurred in the 1780s as a result of both innovations in machinery design and in the harnessing of sources of power, facilitating the relocation of production and removal of industries from their "cottage base", the practice of direct company provision of houses did not end. From the late eighteenth century new industries were increasingly located adjacent to sources of power; textile mills close to rivers for water power; and iron, steel and shipbuilding close to coal seams for furnace and steam power. The proliferation of industries in such locations, often some distance away from existing centres of population, compelled companies to provide housing for the workforce on a much larger scale than before. Workers had to be lured from towns and villages, and from their crofts, to often relatively inaccessible areas. The guarantee of a house was one means of doing so.

The practice of industrial companies supplying housing for their workers was well established by the 1830s. In 1833, 168 of the 881 large firms that made returns on housing provision to the Factory Commission were providing some housing for their workers. Such provision varied in type from a few rows or squares of houses to whole villages housing thousands of workers and including shops, schools, churches and recreation facilities. Quality also varied, although company housing was generally of a higher standard than that of speculative builders. The houses were built to attract suitable workers and were not at this stage of the nineteenth century generally expected to show an economic return on capital investment.

1.3. "Harmonious living".

Once industries were well established the motivation of company owners in providing workers houses changed. Employers were no longer just concerned with attracting and maintaining a workforce, but also with the quality of the labourers. A preoccupation with the quality of the workforce influenced the scale and type of housing provision. "Company towns" in the form of planned, high amenity, villages were an added inducement to attract high quality skilled workers and to motivate them to excel at their work. Such planned settlements were designed;

"not only to ensure to the employer an efficient and contented labour force, but to point the way towards a new relationship between capital and labour and the creation of a new kind of physical environment in which men and machines could live harmoniously together." ⁶

One of the earliest ventures at harmonious living was at New Lanark in Scotland. This entirely new village was built on the banks of the Clyde river in 1785 to accommodate cotton mill workers. By 1794 the mill was the largest in Scotland and the village eventually housed 2500 people. New Lanark is probably best known for the work of Robert Owen who became general manager of the firm in 1800. It was generally believed at the time that the working man was a brutish creature who had to be "moralized lest civilization be trampled beneath the weight of his barbarous boot".⁷ Owen developed his ideas of a utopian society and conducted his social experiments in the village, funded by the profits from the mill. He aimed to

⁶Burnett, J., (1978) *A Social History of Housing 1850-1970*, David Charles, Newton Abbot, p. 176.

⁷Englander, D., (1983) *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1913*. Clarendon, Oxford. p. XV.

provide the correct social environment in which the characters of the workers would be improved. Diligent work practices were an important aspect of good social conduct and were instilled in the workers from the earliest age. The use of the "silent monitor" as a means of regulating the productivity of the youngest workers was undoubtedly a means of ensuring social control. The monitor consisted of a block of different colours which hung from the machines worked by children. Each colour represented grades of moral behaviour from poor to excellent and the monitors were hung in different directions depending upon the childrens' output.

The social experiment conducted at New Lanark was primarily concerned with productivity and discipline. Welfare needs of the workers and their families were nonetheless catered for. In doing so however the company maintained productivity and ensured workplace discipline.

But, New Lanark was an exception, early housing provision was by its very nature generally unplanned. Employers built factories and houses according to economic requirements and workers moved into the area, attracted by jobs and accommodation. These houses differed little from the traditional farm labourers cottages and were generally packed tightly together in rows. By the middle of the nineteenth century larger schemes of company housing were being constructed involving the planning of whole communities. Edward Ackroyd, a Halifax worsted manufacturer built model villages at Copley (1849-53) and at Ackroyden (1859). These settlements are often regarded as the forerunners of the garden city.⁸ Ackroyd recognised a causal relationship between good quality housing and the better health and "moral welfare" of the workers. As at New Lanark moral welfare was associated

⁸Burnett, J., *op. cit.* p. 177.

with diligence at work. Ackroyd however also capitalised on the voting rights of people in possession of a forty shilling freehold by providing his workers with just such a freehold in exchange for their support at elections.

Price's Patent Candle Company, makers of "fine candles since 1830", built Bromborough Pool on the Wirral Peninsula for its workers in 1853. This development of less than a hundred dwellings is of interest in that the houses were of a very high standard for the day. They were constructed with red brick and semi-detached or in terraces of four, with front and back gardens and sanitary facilities adjoining the houses. The survival of these houses to the present day is a testament to their high quality. They were however erected along traditional lines with a "two up, two down" plan and the layout of the scheme lacked imagination. The houses were erected in straight rows with narrow streets between and no open spaces.

In contrast Saltaire a contemporary development, was much more advanced in terms of the evolution of company housing. Titus Salt, a Bradford alpaca manufacturer built Saltaire around his mill between 1852 and 1862. Salt looked to Italy for architectural inspiration. The village consisted of over eight hundred cottages of different styles to avoid monotony. The houses were built to suit the needs of families of different sizes and of different social status. These dwellings too were of a high standard with good ventilation and drainage. Village amenities included garden allotments, churches, reading room, recreation and sports facilities, public baths and wash house, but no public house. Although house rents gave a return of 4% the public amenities were paid for from Salt's personal funds. A contented, disciplined and productive workforce, rather than direct financial profit, was the return for his housing and environmental investment.

The next phase of "utopian planning" did not occur until the 1880s and 1890s with the building of W.H. Lever's Port Sunlight on the Wirral Peninsula (1888), George Cadbury's Bournville (1893) and New Earswick, built by the Rowntree Quaker family of York. The latter were pioneers of safely enclosed areas and cul-de-sacs and the use of bricks and tiles in construction. These settlements were built as alternatives to high density housing; the dominant form of working class housing and of speculative construction throughout Britain at the time. They combined town and country living in a rural setting.

At Port Sunlight the company built semi-detached houses or groups of four and six separated by open spaces and curving roads in order to avoid uniformity of style. The workers lived in near idyllic settings and worked in the adjacent soap factory. The whole scheme was based on profit sharing to give the workers a stake in their own output and rents were below commercial levels.

Bournville was similar in design and layout but was more than a company town. It was built as an ideal alternative community, providing houses for other than company employees. By 1912 there were one thousand dwellings in the village and returns of over 4% were re-invested in further housing development.

Ideas of ideal or utopian communities culminated in 1898 with the publication of Ebenezer Howard's book "Tomorrow-A Peaceful Path to Real Reform" which was reprinted in 1902 as "Garden Cities of Tomorrow".⁹

⁹Howard, Sir. E., (1902) *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. Edited with a preface by F.J. Osborn, Faber and Faber, London, 1945.

Howard's aim was to introduce new and original ideas on the combination of rural and urban living with all the advantages of both. He aimed to produce a selection of ideal plans for dwellings suitable to particular locations with the provision of open spaces and garden plots integral to each. His ideal settlement was a town-country magnet drawing from the countryside and cities everything deemed most attractive in both, while discarding all of their drawbacks.

Howard's work was followed by that of Unwin who published a pamphlet in 1912 entitled "Nothing Gained by Overcrowding; or How the Garden City Type of Development may Benefit both Owner and Occupier". He was the first to stipulate twelve houses as the maximum per acre, a figure which greatly influenced government and local authority planning in pre- and post World War I Britain. A pressure group, the Garden City Association, was formed to commence work on the world's first garden city at Letchworth in Hertfordshire. However there was little public enthusiasm for private ventures such as Letchworth as it was believed that Garden Cities attracted "frivolous" recruits.¹⁰ It was not until the 1940s that the government was forced through urban overcrowding and war damage, to recognise the necessity for town and country planning. The "new towns" that followed drew upon many of the ideas of the Garden City Movement.

The examples of company housing given above are the exceptions to the rule rather than the norm. They were developments on a large scale, built by family firms each infused with a clear ideology; particularly in relation to the "moral welfare" of their workers. As examples of exceptional housing

¹⁰Hardy, D., (1991) "Garden of Urban Delight: How to Build More Housing Without Depleting the Countryside or Creating Urban Blight", in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 19. 07. 1991, p. 16.

schemes erected by extraordinary people they have attracted considerable attention from historians of working class housing.

Though exceptional, the examples given are nonetheless both instructive and important because of their influence on future generations of architects and town planners and as illustrations of the evolution in managerial practice. Throughout the nineteenth century the managerial policy of companies such as Cadbury, Lever and Price, moved from an initial position of primary concern with obtaining and maintaining a workforce to an often philanthropic and altruistic interest in the welfare of employees and a recognition of responsibility towards the workers. In the examples of company housing provision given above, genuine concern for the welfare of the workforce was undoubtedly a motivating factor in leading employers to build, yet the driving force in the background was all the while a desire for increased productivity and output. The ultimate motive was to maintain an efficient workforce, through generating good moral character and thereby ensuring diligent work practice.

1.4. Pre-industrial relations of production and miners' housing

In contrast to the examples given above the more usual response to the need for company housing was pragmatic and piecemeal, with little regard for standard of accommodation or design.¹¹ In the coal-mining industry throughout Britain coal-owners traditionally provided accommodation for their colliers, even prior to large scale industrialisation of the late eighteenth century.

¹¹Melling, J. (1981) "Employers, Industrial Housing and the Evolution of Company Welfare Policies in Britains Heavy Industry: West Scotland 1870-1920", *International Review of Social History*, 26 p. 256.

In Scotland workers in coal mines and salt-works were "astricted" for life to their occupation by enactment of the Scottish Parliament in 1606,¹² 1641¹³ and 1661¹⁴. This legislation which was introduced to reduce vagrancy conferred upon employers powers to virtually enslave the unemployed. For example the 1606 Act of Parliament prohibited coal bearers and saltworkers from changing employment without the permission of their employer in the form of a certificate of freedom. Any individual who might start new employment without this certificate of freedom could be reclaimed by his/her former "master" within a year and a day. If a coalmaster refused to grant a letter of freedom the collier was effectively powerless and had no choice but to remain where he was. Another Act of 1672 permitted coal and salt masters to apprehend vagabonds and their families to set them working in mines. The fact that miners were specifically excluded from the regulations of the Habeus Corpus Act of 1701 was an indication of both their lack of status and power and also of their importance to the industry.

All of these acts empowered coalmasters to maintain and augment their labour supply as they saw fit. Miners were effectively the property of the mine owners. When an individual leased a mine he not only obtained the right to extract minerals but also the right to the workforce attached to the mine. For example, in 1783 the Earl of Leven leased the Balgone mine, in the Parish of Markinch Fife, to two mineral tenants for twenty years. As well as the minerals he assigned to them all rights to "colliers personally

¹²APS IV 286. c. 10

¹³APS V 419 c. 124.

¹⁴APS. VII. 260. c. 280

belonging to him, during the space of the tack".¹⁵

This form of bondage, sometimes referred to as "collier serfdom" and "slavery" was in general use throughout Scottish collieries and prevailed from 1606 until 1799; nearly two hundred years. Its origins lay partly in feudal employment practices and partly in the poor laws of the seventeenth century. Colliers and salters were not released from bondage until the legislation of 1775¹⁶ and 1799¹⁷ which placed them on a par with ordinary voluntary servants.

In the two centuries during which bondage prevailed, patterns of behaviour and conduct emerged that effectively maintained the system. Welfare amenities were guaranteed to miners in exchange for their labour. Miners and their families were the responsibility of the coal-owners who were obliged to provide for their workers. On the other hand miners were equally under an obligation to their coal masters. The relationship between a coalmaster and a collier was sealed by the payment of "arles". These were gifts of money or goods given by the coalmaster to the collier and his family at various stages; upon completing apprenticeship, marriage, the birth of children and death. The net effect was to bind both parties into a set of behaviours and social relationships whereby both parties worked together in the production of coal.

This is not to say that disputes and disagreements did not arise. Examples of

¹⁵ S.R.O. G.R.H. Leven and Melville Papers, Box. 25, 333.

¹⁶15 Geo III c. 28.

¹⁷39. Geo. III. c. 39.

industrial dispute in the early years of mining are well documented, as are cases of bonded miners running away from mines only to be returned when they attempted to find work elsewhere. A miner however never found employment in another mine without the letter of freedom referred to above. Nevertheless, despite being presented as evidence of "slavery", such incidents were isolated cases. Most colliers worked out their lives with one employer and only moved if that employer started to mine elsewhere or passed him on to another coal master with the mine. Neither were they slaves in the strictest sense of the word. A miners property was his own. He was free to marry and to practice religion. In comparison to other workers of the times miners' earnings were relatively high. In the 1760s the average wage of a Scottish coal hewer was 2/6 a day while that of a common labourer was from 6d. to 8d. per day. Scottish colliers were also generally provided with a free house and garden, and free fuel. ¹⁸

Provisions made by coal companies for so called "collier serfs" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries generally included a free house, free fire coal and occasionally a garden, iron to make a fireplace, deal planks for a bed upon marriage, sums of money with the birth of each child and wood for a coffin when they or members of their families died.¹⁹ This was in effect a "package" of welfare amenities which was guaranteed to employees in exchange for their labour power. Miners and their families, while not strictly speaking the property of coal-owners, were nonetheless viewed by their "masters" in a proprietorial manner. As such they were the responsibility of their employers who were obliged to provide them with living accommodation.

¹⁸ Hamilton, H., (1963) *An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Clarendon, Oxford, p. 369.

¹⁹ SRO GRH GD 76/358.

Houses were built to last the period of the mineral lease and were all constructed from locally available materials found in common free stone quarries in the tradition of vernacular house building.²⁰ They were generally of the poorest quality and indistinguishable from the houses of agricultural labourers.

Coal-miners of the eighteenth century were sometimes described as "migratory workers".²¹ Colliers were often moved from one location to another by and with their coalmasters as mineral leases were held for short periods, often only nine years or less. The mobility of miners was a result of the limitations of the mining operation and leasing arrangements rather than a result of their unwillingness to settle in one place.

Coal-mines belonged to the owners of the surface land and were generally held on a lease of the underground minerals separate from the lease of the surface (see Chapter 4 for details on mineral leases and housing). Ground rents and feu duties charged by the land proprietors to coalmasters wishing to erect workers houses discouraged them from providing more than the minimum of housing shelter. The poor quality of housing was a reflection on the short life-span of the mines. Coal-owners were unwilling to invest large amounts in housing when they were likely to move to another site in a few years. Indeed the short duration of early mineral leases was used by coal-owners as an excuse for, and justification of, poor quality housing well

²⁰SRO WRH DD6/1170/7255/30.

²¹In 1793 the Earl of Dundonald wrote that colliers were constantly moving from one colliery to another, while in the preamble to the Emancipation Act of 1799 it was stated that colliers constantly changed their place of residence.

into the twentieth century (see Chapters 8 and 9 for details on housing condition). With either the expiry of the lease or the exhaustion of the mine the houses were transferred to either the new leaseholder or the landed proprietor, or simply abandoned or demolished. In 1791 in the Parish of Carnock in Fife for example, the only houses to have been demolished in the previous ten years were;

"some cottages belonging to the colliers, who frequently move from one colliery to another; and the habitations being slight and superficial soon go to ruin" ²²

The number of houses built in this fashion was quite low as coal was as yet being exploited in a small way. Those employed in the industry were equally few in number and in some cases mines were worked by only a couple of coal-hewers and their families. At Loanhead colliery in Midlothian in 1737 for example there were twenty three houses while in 1752 there were only seventeen houses at Cluny in Fife.

At this time families were of greater economic value than single men. At Grange colliery in the 1790s only married men were entitled to a free house, yard and domestic coal supply. The wives and children of coal-hewers acted as their coal-bearers, "putters" and "getters". Income was dependent upon output and therefore the family as a labour unit yielded greater output as each member was anxious to contribute as much as possible to the family wage. An unmarried collier on the other hand, employing single women, could not expect the same degree of loyalty to the working unit. Entire families worked underground until the passing of the 1842 Mines Act,

²²Sinclair, Sir J., (ed.) (1978) *The Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791-1799, Vol. 10 Fife*, with a new introduction by R. G. Cant, EP Publishing, Wakefield, p. 131.

which banned women, and children under the age of ten years from working below the surface.²³

1.5. Transformation of the Scottish coal-mining industry.

The beginnings of intensive industrialisation and the expansion of trade and industry in the 1780s were followed in the early decades of the nineteenth century by a transformation of the coal-mining industry across Britain. Scottish production of coal increased dramatically after 1830 in response to demands from the domestic market and from heavy industry. In order to meet these demands the coal-owners had to increase output within the framework of the existing industry. The two major obstacles to expansion had to be tackled. These were (1) problems of drainage and (2) productivity. Drainage was improved by mechanical means. Water was either pumped from the mines or raised by horse and manpower by a system of wheels and pulleys. The problem of labour supply and productivity was however more difficult to overcome.

It had become clear by the end of the eighteenth century that the existing population of colliers and their families was not sufficient to increase coal production. The very system of bondage was a hindrance to industrial expansion as it denied coal-owners the advantages of free bargaining in the labour market at a time when demand for coal was ever increasing. There were not enough colliers, coal bearers and salters in Scotland to produce the quantities of coal and salt needed. The only possible solution was an input of new labour, but the system of perpetual bondage and employment opportunities elsewhere in the economy discouraged other workers from

²³ 5 & 6 Vict. c. 99.

entering the mines.²⁴ In the end it was Scottish coal-owners who took the initiative in bringing the lifelong contract to an end. In order to gain access to free labour Scottish coal-owners agitated for and achieved the passage of the Emancipation Act of 1799. The fundamental purpose of the act was therefore primarily economic as clearly stated in the preamble to the Act;

"And whereas persons are discouraged and prevented from learning the art and business of colliers and coalbearers and salters, by their becoming bound to the collieries and saltworks for life, by means whereof there are not a sufficient number of colliers, coalbearers and salters in Scotland for working the quantities of coal and salt necessarily wanted, and many new discovered coals remain unwrought and many are not sufficiently wrought, to the great loss of the owners and disadvantage of the publick."²⁵

The termination of collier bondage was enacted in the Emancipation Act of 1775 and finally abolished in an amendment of 1779. The Emancipation Bill was introduced to Parliament in March 1774. Its passage may have been aided by humanitarian sentiments aroused following Lord Mansfield's judgement against negro slavery in 1772. In that year the English law case of *Sommersett* (which corresponded to the Scottish case of *Knight* referred to below) was decided by Lord Mansfield and appears to have stimulated public opinion in Scotland to agitate against the servile status of Scottish colliers.²⁶ The first of the emancipation acts was passed after the *Sommersett* case in 1775. In 1778 a Scottish legal battle concerning master and servant, between *Knight* and *Wedderburn* (the latter a negro from Jamaica) finally established

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Preamble to 1775 Emancipation Act, 15 Geo. III c. 28.

²⁶Campbell, G. and Paton, H. (1958) in *An Introduction to Scottish Legal History by Various Authors, Stair Society, Vol. 20*, p. 13.

that the state of slavery was not recognised in Scottish law.²⁷ The second emancipation act followed in 1799, and finally freed colliers and salters from their bondage to coalmasters.²⁸ Yet the Act was not passed for humanitarian reasons, nor was it agitated for by the colliers themselves. Hewers of coal were in no position to lobby for a change in work practice. Rather the impetus for its enactment came from the coal-owners themselves encouraged by Adam Smith's economic doctrines:

"Theories favouring competition without controls, *laissez-faire* and so called complete freedom of contract between employer and workmen regarding conditions of employment were fully supported by the legislature, by the judges on all levels and not unnaturally by large employers of labour - who often as justices and magistrates participated in the enforcement of the law of master and servant in the lower courts."²⁹

From then on all persons not in actual employment at collieries, but who should thereafter become miners were to be treated as free labourers. For those already working in the mines freedom was to be granted in gradual phases depending on the number of years served in the mines.

A major defect of the 1775 Act was that colliers were obliged to establish their claim to freedom in the sheriff court. Few had the financial resources to do so. Many colliers were also under a financial obligation to their employers due to the advancement of sums of money and the acceptance of arles. Thus despite the Emancipation Act of 1775 many colliers were still tied to particular collieries at the end of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the occupation still remained unpopular and failed to attract new labour. In

²⁷*Ibid.* p. 59.

²⁸ 39 Geo. III c. 39.

²⁹Paton, G.C.H. and Cameron, J.G.S. *op. cit.* p. 138.

April in 1799 a Bill was introduced amending the 1775 Act in an attempt to rectify the situation. The 1779 Act removed the last traces of collier bondage. All miners still bound to collieries were granted their freedom on June 13 1799. This further piece of legislation did not however bring about the expected influx of workers to the mines. Instead the existing colliers are alleged to have left the mines in their hundreds. However, replacement labour soon became available. The migration of highland and Irish peasantries to the industrial centres of the Scottish lowlands and later the decline in handloom weaving provided a pool of available labour. Economic depression drove thousands of unskilled labourers into the coal-mining industry. Following the passage of the Emancipation Act of 1799 colliers were hired on an annual basis in a similar manner to the annual hiring of agricultural labourers.³⁰ These new workers had also to be housed as existing communities were unable to cater for the increase in population. As a direct result houses were hastily erected adjacent to the coal workings in squares or in long rows of up to one hundred single storeyed dwellings.

The descendants of collier serfs that remained continued many of the traditions and work practices of their forebears and became what Campbell and Reid described as "independent colliers".³¹ Independent colliers viewed themselves as skilled artisans and their work as a craft. They regulated their own productivity by deciding themselves how long to work underground and how much coal to cut.³² They worked in teams, each member of which

³⁰Johnston, T., (1922) *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*. Forward, Glasgow. p. 330.

³¹ Campbell, A. & Reid, F. (1978) "The Independent Collier in Scotland" in Harrison, R., *The Independent Collier; The Coal-miners' as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered*, Harvested, Sussex.

³² *Ibid.* pps. 55-56.

had defined responsibilities for particular aspects of the work, and often negotiated their own remuneration. It was the culture and values of the independent colliers that later clashed with the ideology of mid-nineteenth century capitalist coal companies.

By the early nineteenth century it became the norm to stipulate the construction of houses in leasing agreements. Evidence for this can be found in leasing and tack agreements preserved in the Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh. In 1803 for example, at Houston colliery in Linlithgow, the construction of ten houses at a cost of £100 sterling and the renovation of the existing colliers houses to a tenable condition were written into the lease.³³ In instances where the leaseholder was not the proprietor of the land, the former was responsible for the erection and upkeep of the workers' houses. The buildings however reverted to the landowner upon expiry of the lease, usually in exchange for a valuation payment by the proprietor. The legal complications that arose as a result of this practice are considered in detail in Chapter 4.

During the course of the nineteenth century miners housing gradually ceased to be regarded as a short-term responsibility. Its quality and quantity however continued to vary. William Cobbett author of "Rural Rides" noted in 1830 that the Durham miners were well housed;

"Their work is terrible to be sure . . . but at any rate they live well, their houses are good and their furniture good".³⁴

³³SRO GRH GD/30/698.

³⁴Cole, G.D.H. and Cole M., (eds.) (1930) *Rural Rides by William Cobbett*, Vol III p. 868.

In contrast the sanitary reports of the 1840s condemned the condition in which miners were housed; ". . . . most intolerably filthy and unwholesome" with unfurnished and overcrowded interiors.³⁵ In 1864 in the seventh report to the privy council on the distribution of disease which marked the first national enquiry into the dwellings of rural labourers Dr. John Simon, a health inspector, described remote coal-mining villages as; ". . . . foul, priviless, ill watered, unscavenged, overcrowded lairs".³⁶ While generally described in such bleak terms the types and standards of miners houses depended upon several factors; the location of the collieries, access to building materials and supplies, the nature of the mineral lease, and the attitudes of the individual employers and managers. Employers were generally free to "run up" rows of houses with little regard for water drainage, access roads or other amenities.³⁷ As a result of such practices in many instances antiquated housing stock was maintained and poor quality, hastily erected houses were often in use eighty to a hundred years after their construction.

1.5.1. The example of Fordell village, Fife.

Developments at the mining village of Fordell in Fife throughout the nineteenth century illustrate the changes in housing provision for miners and hence the change in social relations of production that occurred during the nineteenth century. The Fordell mining company owned and managed by the local landed family, the Hendersons of Fordell, was well established

³⁵Scott Alison, S., (1842) *Tranent and Colliery Districts, Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Scotland*, HMSO, London, pps. 87-89.

³⁶ Simon, J., in Seaton E., (ed.) (1887) *Public Health Reports*.

³⁷ Gauldie, E., *op. cit.* p. 118.

by the early 1800s. Along with the colliery the estate consisted of saltpans and brickworks. Saltpans were in operation in conjunction with collieries all along coastal Fife in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while brickworks existed alongside coal mines well into the twentieth century.³⁸

It was the policy of the Henderson family to provide homes for the estate workers. The Fordell coal company kept detailed records of the houses built for colliers and their families which include descriptions of the houses and details on the tenants, the size of families and gender of the occupants. These records which are cited in the following pages survive for the period 1814 to 1894 and are housed at the Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh. They provide a fascinating glimpse into life in a small coal-mining community in the nineteenth century and into one company's policy towards housing workers during that period. The changes in managerial policy and practice that occurred in the nineteenth century are outlined below and reflect economic pressures on the industry; increase in workforce, pressure for living space, demand for return of investment in housing, pressure for new building, and a deterioration of the existing housing stock.

The Henderson's of Fordell were reputed to be greatly concerned with the social conditions of their employees and a good working relationship between the owners and their employees existed into the early years of the twentieth century³⁹ (see Chapter 6 for more information on paternalism and deference at Fordell). The Fordell coal company provided a company doctor

³⁸For information on saltpans see Whatley, C. A., (1987) *The Scottish Salt Industry 1750-1850. An Economic and Social History*. Aberdeen University Press.

³⁹Holman, R., (1952) *Behind the Diamond Panes: The Story of a Fife Mining Community*. West Fife Publishing Company, Cowdenbeath.

and library facilities as well as workers houses. The surviving housing records detail the type and numbers of houses erected, and provide information on the tenants be they colliers and their families, widows, the ill and infirm, beggars or as in one case, a soldier.

According to the records the Fordell coal company owned 103 houses in the village in 1814 which accommodated 418 people. The houses were erected in rows and had either one or two fireplaces, possibly corresponding to one and two rooms. They were usually occupied by families with in some instances, up to thirteen members. In the cases of such large families two houses were amalgamated into one. There were also thirty widows and widowers in the community who occupied single dwellings.⁴⁰ By 1853 the number of houses had risen to 175, while the population of the village had dramatically increased to 812. These houses had one or two rooms and were occupied by families of up to eleven members and fifteen widows who lived alone. There were two larger houses in the village, each a three room dwelling and occupied by the school teacher and a company clerk. Three of the dwellings at Fordell Square in the centre of the community were described as "upstairs" which suggests that these houses were either one and a half or two storey buildings and if so would be an indication of pressure on housing and a move away from the traditional "but-and-ben" style of construction. Special reference was made to those members of the community unable to work in the mines; the ill and the widowed were permitted to remain in their homes, and received half or one peck⁴¹ of meal per week gratis from the coal company.⁴²

⁴⁰SRO GRH GD 172/848.

⁴¹ One "peck" of meal equals half a bushel, 2 gallons or eight quarts.

⁴²SRO GRH GD 172/689.

By 1855, however, just two years later, subtle and far reaching changes had occurred in the social relations between the coal company and it's colliers. By then the miners at Fordell were paying rent for their houses. The one hundred "cottages" in the village at the time each had an annual rental of either £2 2/- or £3 3/-. Details of the size of these houses are not given but by cross referencing the information on occupiers between the file of 1853⁴³ and that of 1855⁴⁴ it would appear that the houses with an annual rental of £2 2/- were one roomed and those rented for £3 3/- per annum had two rooms. Twenty-six houses, at Douglas Cottages, Monteath Terrace and Muir Row have no rents recorded but this is more likely to be an oversight rather than indicating "rent free" properties. The charging of an annual rental may indicate that the workers were employed on the basis of annual contract. It is interesting to note too that from 1855 onwards women and children were no longer recorded in the company's housing records, instead details of the male heads of households alone are recorded. In the 1814 records wives, sons and daughters had been listed presumably because they were employed in or about the mine. By 1853 only total numbers were given, with no gender divisions.

As noted earlier family work units were central to the organisation of coal output in seventeenth and eighteenth century Scotland. Following the 1842 Mines Act, legislation instigated for humanitarian reasons because of appalling working conditions underground, women and children were barred from working at the coalface. Although they continued to work on

⁴³ SRO GRH GD 172/689.

⁴⁴SRO GRH GD 172/901.

the surface they were thereafter no longer productive workers in terms of coal output and presumably no longer warranted specific mention in company records. By the end of the nineteenth century women had assumed a largely supportive role in coal production as wives, mothers and sisters to hewers of coal.

During the years 1872 and 1873 the Fordell coal company built new houses for the colliers at Balbougie.⁴⁵ These had slate roofs and new roads were laid for access. The old housing stock dating back to before 1814 was still in use but deteriorated all the while. In 1884 a report on the condition of the workers houses was commissioned by the company. Details of 158 houses, their types and the amount of renovation needed were provided. These houses were described as either "single" or "double" dwellings, and once again it is not clear whether the term "double" referred to two rooms, houses conjoined, or "back-to-back" dwellings. But again by cross referencing with details from 1853 it can be deduced that single houses had one apartment and double houses had two rooms.⁴⁶ A few houses are listed as having three apartments with the occasional mention of an "attic" (perhaps the "upstairs" dwellings of 1853). Only ten of the houses were unoccupied and in poor condition, while the remainder required some form of renovation mainly to the roofs, floors and rhones. It is of interest that these houses were rented fortnightly with a charge of between 2/1 and 5/-. "Single" houses were rented at 2/1 and "double" dwellings at 2/7, 3/2 or 3/10. Three apartments cost 4/10 or 5/- per fortnight. Wages by then were correspondingly paid on a fortnightly basis and it was the usual practice in Fife for rent to be deducted from wages at source (see Chapter 7 for details on

⁴⁵SRO GRH GD 172/909.

⁴⁶SRO GRH GD 172/689.

rent for Fife's coal company housing.) Only a few houses were rent free.

In 1884 the rents of widows were being charged to their sons.⁴⁷ In the earlier records the widowed and ill were housed rent free and provided with a measure of meal each week at the company's expense. This change in practice is a strong indication of a change in the Fordell company's attitude to (1) dependants and non-productive workers and (2) return for investment in housing. These are themes explored in greater depth in chapter 7. In 1894 rents were still paid fortnightly, this time averaging at 2/7 and 3/10. Only twenty one households were in arrears of between two and six fortnightly payments.⁴⁸

This brief and incomplete account of the history of workers housing at Fordell is a microcosm of the concerns of the dissertation. In the early years of the nineteenth century at Fordell the workers and coal-owners clung to the traditions of the pre-industrial relations of collier serfdom. All of the welfare needs of the workers were catered for by the coal master, houses were provided rent free, health care was seen to by a doctor and education and recreation needs were catered for by the provision of a company library. The coal company was more than willing to invest money in the welfare needs of its employees as a means of ensuring stable productivity.

By the middle of the century the whole scene had begun to change; workers were paying rent and women and children were no longer recorded in company records indicating a greater degree of preoccupation with output of the male colliers and a move away from concern for the whole community.

⁴⁷SRO GRH GD 172/941.

⁴⁸SRO GRH GD 172/947.

By the end of the century the residual elements of pre-industrial relations of production were disappearing. Widows and the ill were no longer regarded as the responsibility of the coal company and their homes were viewed as a financial investment rather than as an investment in the welfare of the workers. If widows were unable to pay rent, their sons were expected to pay it for them.

A similar evolutionary process to that of Fordell is evident in other Fife coal-mining communities, in particular those of coastal east Fife, where in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century the coal mining industry was under severe pressure and local autonomy was threatened by external forces.

1.6. Different patterns of social relations.

The change-over from collier serfdom to free labour was a national Britain-wide phenomenon and took different forms. Different practices emerged in different localities. This section illustrates some of the variations that occurred.

As already noted, housing was an important element in a range of welfare amenities provided by industrialists throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Whether or not such services were provided depended upon the relative age of the enterprise and upon the situation in the area pre-dating the foundation of the extractive industry. Older long established operations, run by family firms, were more likely to have close and paternalistic relations with their workers than firms founded in the late nineteenth century;

"Within the same manufacturing or extractive industry there were significant variations between firms of similar geographical or economic positions in regard to

housing choices. Particular employers developed labour management strategies which provoked serious resistance or alternatively acted to secure a passive and contented workforce. The relative value of housing as an investment decision can only be fully appraised when these general policies are brought into view."⁴⁹

Houses tended to be provided to meet the labour requirements of the companies. Although, as outlined by Melling workers houses may also have been provided to emphasise "the gradation of an industrial hierarchy or to weaken the market position of an existing employer" rather than simply as a result of a labour shortage.⁵⁰ The provision and allocation of company housing undoubtedly bestowed considerable power upon management. The companies were both landlord and employer. The realms of home and work - both central to the lives of miners - were inextricably linked.

Daunton and Melling have examined the social consequences of the provision of workers houses by studying the social relations arising from company provision and control of housing in the Durham and Northumberland coal mines and in the South Wales coal field.⁵¹ Such studies of an individual locality or a particular industry are fruitful in gleaning accurate information on the processes and changes involved in particular circumstances. By comparing individual industries and differences between mining regions the identification of general processes in

⁴⁹Melling, J., (1981) "Employers, Industrial Housing and the Evolution of Company Welfare Policies in Britain's Heavy Industry: West Scotland 1870-1920" in *International Review of Social History* 26, pps. 255-301.

⁵⁰*ibid.* p. 225.

⁵¹Daunton, M.J., (1980) Miners Housing in South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield 1860-1914, *International Review of Social History* XXV, pps. 143-175 and Melling J., *Op. cit.*

the evolution of employers housing can begin.

Daunton in his work on the coal-mining communities of the Great Northern and the South Wales coalfields distinguishes between two groups of coal-mining districts; those having a high proportion of company owned houses and those with a low proportion (Table 1.1). The distinction is made not only in terms of the absolute amount but also in terms of the effects of different agencies of provision on the pattern of social relations. In the instances showing a high proportion of company owned housing the collieries were all located in previously undeveloped and remote regions. In the absence of alternative agencies the coal-owners were compelled to become the principal provider of workers houses. In the examples with a low proportion of company owned property the mines were located in areas with a pre-existing housing stock and thus other agencies of construction were already present.

As a means of illustrating this point the situation in the Durham and Northumberland and the South Wales coalfields are briefly explored below. Coal was extracted in the Durham and Northumberland coalfields long before large scale industrialisation of the mid-nineteenth century. The coal-owners of the north east regarded the provision of accommodation for their employees as their sole responsibility. Workers houses were all built with company funds and were allocated rent free. In 1913 they represented 96.4% of all free colliery houses in Britain. If the stock of free housing was insufficient rent allowances were paid to the miners. The payment of a rent allowance in lieu of a free house was peculiar to this coalfield and is an example of distinct social relations that evolved in this locality. However, only married miners were entitled to free accommodation or the rent allowance. The provision of free accommodation may have been a

hangover from pre-industrial days while the payment of rent allowances may represent residual influences of pre-industrial social relations. This would indicate that the coal-owners of the north east wished to maintain the social relations of production that had evolved in the coalfield while gradually decreasing investment in housing stock.

Such a reaction to economic pressure is evident also in Fife mining areas, particularly in relation to long established paternalistic firms. To what extent the payment of the rent allowance was a voluntary or involuntary act as a result of a feeling of obligation or compunction is unclear. It is nonetheless an interesting response on the part of the coal-owners to the financial constraints of the time. Different responses to similar forces arose elsewhere.

In the south Wales coalfield different social processes were in action. Houses were rented to the miners at close to market rates. As a result the coal companies in this region gained a market return for their investment. The difference between Wales and the north east of England was that the former's coalfield was relatively young; exploited from the 1850s onwards. There was therefore no pre-existing tradition of coal company housing provision in the region; there were no ties of obligation and no sense of responsibility towards workers.

Similar evidence of distinct approaches to providing housing for coal-miners is given in Campbell's work on the Lanarkshire mines in Scotland.⁵² There two different forms of housing provision existed side by side in the one coalfield. In one part of the coalfield the coal companies built houses for

⁵²Campbell, A.B., (1979) *The Lanarkshire Miners. A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775-1874*, John Donald, Edinburgh.

the workers, while in another the miners tended to construct the houses themselves by forming building clubs and societies. Again the latter pattern appears to be derived from the system of house building which pre-dated coal extraction. The indigenous population of weavers formed building clubs as early as the late eighteenth century.

It is apparent from these examples that housing was either an integral part of the relationship between the coal-owners and colliers or an altogether separate transaction. Completely different patterns of social relations evolved in localities which exhibited apparent similarities. Work practice and tradition, either indigenous to an area or peculiar to a type of work or a group of employees, were more important in dictating social relations than the industry itself. Patterns of social relations that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were influenced by past relations of production as well as by developments peculiar to each coal-mining district.

1.7. Conclusion

The management of social relations was a key aspect of industrial capitalism in nineteenth century Britain. Specific social relations of production evolved from pre-industrial times and were based upon the mutual dependence of workers and coal masters. Coal-owners for example were concerned with output, productivity and profits and were willing to invest company funds in the welfare of workers in order to guarantee the maintenance of each. Workers on the other hand were willing to exchange their productivity for a package of welfare amenities necessary for day-to-day living. Forms of behaviour based upon mutual dependence became normal working practices and were passed on from one generation to the next. This was particularly true of the Scottish coal-mining industry where

communities of miners often lived apart from other workers and developed their own traditions and where coal companies were often managed by successive generations of the same family. Distinct patterns of social relations therefore arose from the organisation of the industry.

Pre-industrial social relations of production contrasted sharply with the capitalist relations that emerged during the nineteenth century as industries expanded and the numbers employed increased. Employers and managers of highly mechanised enterprises of the second half of the nineteenth century were concerned primarily with productivity and the regulation of labour relations. Workers lost whatever control they had over their own labour and output. The scale of the housing provision, its amount and location, and the organisation of the industries supplying houses changed too.

By the end of the nineteenth century individual companies, aware of the powers of control bestowed upon them through the provision of welfare amenities for their workers, developed forms of social welfare provision with specific results in view. A subtle change had occurred in the attitude of coal-owners to investment in housing and to the distribution of housing largesse. Employers provision of jobs and houses and their ability to manipulate both in favour of output, conferred upon them considerable powers of socialisation and social control. By the early years of the twentieth century social welfare provision particularly in the form of tied housing was used both overtly and covertly as a means of disciplining the workforce.

Political events too, in particular the intervention of the government in the housing market after the 1870s, played a significant role in determining company policy and thereby social relations in coal-mining communities. In the final decades of the nineteenth century the issue of working class

housing became a primary concern of the government. Central government regulated housing construction and design through the enactment of housing, health, sanitation and police acts; and local authorities did the same through the imposition of bye-laws. This intervention culminated in the Housing Acts of 1919⁵³ and 1923⁵⁴, when local authorities were given power to build new dwellings, to subsidise private enterprise in housing construction as well as to dictate standards.

Housing provision was therefore an important aspect of the evolving welfare policies of both industrialists and government. The primary concern of the companies was to manage an efficient workforce. In the execution of the management they had to juggle several disparate elements; pressure of economic forces, increasing government intervention in housing and industry and the unionisation of the workforce.

All of these issues, as they pertained to the Fife coalfield, are dealt with in the dissertation. The remainder of Part I provides the historical background needed to evaluate social relations of production prevalent in Fife between 1870 and 1930. Chapter 2 outlines economic and political developments that affected coal company housing provision and Chapter 3 details important housing legislation and the difficulties associated with implementing legislation in mining areas. Chapter 4, explains how coal companies provided houses under mineral leases.

⁵³9 & 10 Geo. 5. c. 50. 1919 Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act; (known as the Addison Act).

⁵⁴13 & 14 Geo. 5. c. 24. 1923 Housing etc. Act; (known as the Chamberlain Act).

Table 1.1. Colliery Company Housing 1913*(a) High Proportion of Company Housing* (% of Great Britain Total)

Area	Workmen	Company Free Houses	Company Rented Houses	All Company Houses
Scotland	12.0	1.1	36.0	19.9
Cumberland	0.9	0.1	2.1	1.2
South Staffs.)				
Shropshire}	0.4	0.0	1.1	10.9
Worcs.)				
Durham	17.1	73.5	0.4	34.2

(b) Low Proportion of Company Houses (% of Great Britain Total)

Area	Workmen	Company Free Houses	Company Rented Houses	All Company Houses
South Wales	19.2	0.5	16.4	9.1
South Yorks.	9.5	0.3	14.3	7.8
West Yorks.	5.8	0.2	5.3	2.9
Noths & Derbys.	9.2	0.2	12.4	6.8
Leics. & Warwicks.	2.6	0.1	2.1	1.2
Cannoch Chase.	2.2	0.1	1.4	0.8
North Staffs.	3.0	0.1	0.8	0.4
Lancs. & Cheshire.	10.0	0.2	6.4	3.6
North Wales.	1.2	0.0	0.5	0.3

Source: *Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1925, Vol. III Appendices & Index. Appendix 18, Tables 13 and 37* [After Daunton, M.J. (1980)]

Chapter 2

The development of the Fife and Scottish coal-mining industry

2.1. Introduction

Throughout its history the Scottish coal-mining industry has experienced periods of expansion and contraction and has been constantly subjected to fluctuations in market conditions. In economic terms the period under review, - 1870 to 1930 - can be divided into two contrasting eras: the first leading up to the outbreak of the First World War of 1914-18, and the second that of the inter-war years culminating in the Second World War of 1939-45. The first period has been described by Kirby as the era of "expansion" in the coal-mining industry¹ while the later is regarded by Campbell as the period of the "industry under pressure".²

Paralleling these economic eras there existed periods of company house building. Prior to the Great War the provision of housing was an integral part of company policy, particularly in Fife. After the First World War however, coal companies showed a decided reluctance to continue to provide houses from company funds. The intervention of government, through the construction of working class dwellings by local authorities, represented an escape route for the coal-owners from the responsibility of housing workers. However it must be borne in mind that no matter how convenient it may be to categorise events in a before and after format, the

¹ Kirby, M. W., (1977) *The British Coal-mining Industry, 1870-1946*, Macmillan, London, p. 6.

² Campbell, R.H., (1965) *Scotland Since 1707, The Rise of an Industrial Society*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 249

seeds of the changes that occurred in the aftermath of the Great War were firmly implanted well before its outbreak. The social upheaval of international war acted as an accelerator to social change rather than an impetus.

As outlined in Chapter 1 company housing provision should be analysed in the context of the economic development of the industries concerned. This chapter endeavours to provide an outline of the economic issues that affected the Fife mining industry. While by no means exhaustive or extensive in content, the chapter's function is to provide an insight into the problems of, and pressures on, the industry during the period of study. In section two the broad economic issues of the period are introduced, while in section three the economic history of the Fife coal-mining industry from the earliest years of extraction to the twentieth century is outlined. In section four another of the economic pressures on the Scottish coal-mining industry during the period in question, that of labour relations, is considered. The section takes up the subject of labour in the mines and outlines the development and organisation of miners as a strong and determined workforce. Section five outlines briefly the history of the miners' union in Fife. The theme of labour relations is introduced at this stage as Scottish miners played an important role in bringing housing conditions to national attention in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10). In addition, the breakdown in relations between Fife miners and coal owners was demonstrated in the increasing unionisation and radicalism of the Fife miners. By the end of the chapter the relationship between company housing and labour relations will be clear. In Fife mining communities home and workplace were inextricably linked through the medium of the company house.

2.2. Cycles of prosperity in nineteenth century coal-mining

Successful deep mining began in Scotland in the late sixteenth century, while what can more accurately be described as commercial intensive mining began at Culross in Fife in the late seventeenth century. In 1575 a lease was granted to Sir George Bruce by the Commendator of the Abbey at Culross. This was one of the earliest examples of land proprietors leasing the right to extract minerals to private individuals. Sir George sank the first deep shaft mine under the sea to access the coal of the "Jenny Peat" seam. His use of the chain and bucket pumping system facilitated the sinking of shafts below the water table. This drainage system was adopted at Wemyss in 1622 where a shaft twenty fathoms below sea level was worked. In 1676, David, second Earl of Wemyss, regarded by some as Scotland's first mining engineer, used both horses and windmills to pump water from his pits.³

By the eighteenth century coal extraction was a well established enterprise and the most easily accessible seams had already been worked. Sinking shafts and the installation of pumping machinery to access deeper seams of coal required high capital investment. A mine at Methil, in Fife, for example sunk between 1660 and 1667 cost over £8000.⁴ In 1705 the cost of sinking a shaft and installing pumping machinery at Carden in Fife was almost £600.⁵ Such high capital investment was considered worthwhile however as coal was by then used in the manufacture of salt, dye-stuffs,

³ Smith, A., (1952) *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. The County of Fife*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, p. 231.

⁴ Hamilton, H., (1963) *An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon, Oxford, p. 188. The price included the cost of salt pans and the construction of the harbour at Methil.

⁵ Nef, J.U., (1932) *The Rise of the British Coal Industry, Vol. 1*. Routledge, London, pps. 336, 378.

lime, bricks, glass, in refining sugar and in dying malt.⁶ Throughout the century demand for coal also increased from the iron smelting and forging industries.

Several developments during the eighteenth century aided the expansion and mechanisation of the coal-mining industry. Firstly, Abraham Darby discovered how to use coal, in the form of coke, in iron smelting. Secondly, Thomas Newcomen developed a method of using coal as a fuel for steam power. This led to the widespread use of the steam pump in the drainage and ventilation of mines.⁷ Thirdly, the extension of road, rail and water transport increased the distances over which coal could be carried inland and reduced the industry's dependence upon coastal locations and sea transport. Finally, railways were developed and acted as efficient means of conveying coal to ports. In 1781 for example the Lloyd brothers built a timber track between Townhill and Halbeath collieries in Fife. In 1785 a wooden railway acknowledged as the most complete in Britain at the time, was in use in the Alloa colliery in Clackmannan.⁸ These tracks conveyed wagons of coal to port, each containing thirty hundred-weight of coal. Development of wagon-ways and railways continued into the nineteenth century. In 1812 a railway was opened from the Duke of Portland's collieries at Kilmarnock to his harbour at Troon. Later, in 1856, the West of Fife Mineral Railway from Townhill to Kelty connecting with the Perth line was constructed.

The production of coal increased dramatically after 1832 following

⁶ Flinn, M.W., (1984) *History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 2, 1700-1830, The Industrial Revolution*, Clarendon, Oxford, p. 1

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁸ Galloway, R., (1971) *Annals of Coal Mining and the Coal Trade, Vol. 1, up to 1835*, (reprint of the 1904 edition), David Charles, Newton Abbot, p. 304.

innovations in engineering and the discovery of new seams. Employment in mining throughout Scotland rose from 39,200 to 146,200 people. The exportation of coal became increasingly important. By 1870 nearly 70% of Scotland's coal output came from Lanarkshire and Ayrshire, usurping the position of the traditionally dominant west Fife coalfield.

Despite all of these developments, the Scottish coal-mining industry remained largely concentrated in Fife, Ayrshire and the area around Glasgow until the nineteenth century. From its inception, however, it had developed from surface digging to deep shaft extraction; from a part time occupation for domestic needs to a large scale industrial enterprise with home and overseas markets. Coal trade of the late nineteenth century in particular was subject to fluctuations of expansion, recession and general industrial depression.⁹ The industry was under constant pressure from variable market forces. The early 1870s, for example were "boom" years when prosperity was stimulated by increased demand as a result of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. Coal production collapsed in France and Germany leaving a gap in the market quickly filled by British coalfields. To satisfy this demand over one thousand and four hundred new pits were sunk throughout the U.K. between 1871 and 1875.¹⁰

During these same years the Scottish coal-mining industry split into two distinct mining areas. The coalfields of western Scotland catered for the demands of large Clydeside iron and steel works and were managed by small

⁹ Court, W.H.B., (1945) Problems of the British Coal Industry Between the Wars, *Economic History Review, First Series*, 15, p. 2.

¹⁰ Rostow, W. W., (1948) *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century*, Clarendon, Oxford, pps. 75, 212.

firms and large iron and coal companies. The eastern coalfields on the other hand, were oriented towards the export trade and were worked mainly by small family-run firms.

Although this was the basic division the pattern of colliery ownership varied considerably in its concentration. In Lanarkshire for example a few large companies were surrounded by several small companies which owned only one or two mines. Developments in the eastern coalfields led to what Campbell described as a "concentrated industrial structure" whereby Fife and Clackmannanshire which originally had a multiplicity of small firms were dominated by four large companies by the 1920s. (Two of these, the Fife Coal Company Ltd., and the Wemyss Coal Company feature throughout the dissertation.)

Although the fortunes of the western and eastern areas were not entirely independent of one another, in that both regions competed for inland trade, they nonetheless developed according to the dictates of different forces. The western coalfields were largely dependent upon the prosperity of the iron industry while the eastern fields depended for their prosperity upon export trade, in turn influenced by events on the European mainland. The concentration of the eastern coal companies on export to the European mainland was encouraged by the slump in continental production during the Franco-Prussian war years. Export prices for coal tended to be higher than those gained through inland trade. Hence the eastern collieries thrived during the boom years of the early 1870s. Coal was sent to Denmark, Germany, Norway, Russia and Sweden while a small proportion was exported to the West Indies, America and Ireland.

By 1877 however continental collieries had recovered from the effects of the

Franco-Prussian war and had resumed production. As a result both the value and volume of Scottish coal exports fell and decreases in coal prices eventually led to wage cuts and the closure of pits.¹¹ The effects of economic depression were exacerbated by inter-regional rivalry; not only within Scotland but with the north of England as well. Each mining district was in open competition with the next and had its own cost structure leading to a "free for all" in the effort to find new markets. The situation was complicated by the divergence of interest between areas reliant on the inland trade and areas marketing their coal abroad.¹² In conditions where the expansion of the inland trade was difficult there followed greater competition for export sales.

In order to compete for coal contracts with continental collieries Scottish coal-owners demanded greater output from the colliers. The effectiveness of the productive effort depended upon output per worker. Higher output was achieved however, not by greater productivity per unit of effort and increased efficiency, but, by employing more workers in the mines. Between the years 1889 and 1913 for example the productive capacity of the British coal-mining industry increased by 60%, while during the same period the numbers employed underground increased by over 90% and those working at the surface by 185%.¹³ Despite the increase in the workforce overall production declined.

¹¹ Campbell, R.H., (1965) *Scotland since 1707, The Rise of an Industrial Society*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 241.

¹² Court, W.H.B., *Op. cit.* p. 2.

¹³ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 7.

One possible explanation for the decline in productivity in Scotland is the lack of entrepreneurship in the Scottish coal-mining industry prior to 1914, especially in the use of technical innovations as a means of combating rising costs.¹⁴ Between 1871 and 1873 coal-owners invested heavily in new plant, which resulted in increased output while in the 1880s and 1890s they introduced powerful fans to improve ventilation and washing, separating appliances. However Scottish coal-owners have been faulted for their sluggishness in the introduction of such innovations as haulage machinery, electricity and coal cutting equipment and for their conservative attitude to technical education. Their reluctance to invest in electricity was largely due to the expense of its introduction and the uncertainty of results. Nevertheless by 1891 electricity had been proved more economical and less dangerous than any other form of power. The initial cost of its introduction was however heavy while the fact that mining labour was plentiful and cheap in Scotland meant that coal-owners were disinclined to consider such expense. As a result coal-cutting machinery was in use in only eight collieries across Scotland at the end of the century. One of these was a Fife Coal Company pit at Lumphinnans in west Fife.¹⁵

The reasons behind such inherent conservatism and managerial inertia in the face of technical innovation are unclear. They may derive from the physical isolation of some of the enterprises, or loyalty to tradition and inherited work practices. They may equally result from short-sightedness on the part of long established coal-owners, who saw little advantage to the introduction of innovations when an abundant supply of labour was

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Macintyre, S., (1980) *Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*. Croom Helm, London, p. 53.

available.

At the time the industry, not only in Scotland, but throughout Britain was dominated by family-run firms. These generally small enterprises engaged in intense competition. As late as 1925 almost half of national coal output was mined by privately owned companies.¹⁶ The size of their operations has been suggested as both a cause and a result of their lack of enterprise. Whatever the reason, the technology of past generation was in use well into the twentieth century.

While small commercial mining operations were known for their conservatism they also showed remarkable resilience in the face of trade depression. According to evidence presented to the Sankey Commission on the Coal Industry in 1919 a number of Scottish collieries sustained losses for five consecutive years at a time and yet stayed in production.¹⁷ One reason for this is that coal mines had no abandonment value. If a colliery closed it would have been impossible for the coal-owner to recover his investment.

The need for financial investment to support expansion in the industry placed great pressure upon Scottish coal companies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Developments during the final decades of the nineteenth century in company organisation and finance, particularly the investment of public capital and the opening of the industry to share speculation, resulted in changes in the management of the industry.

¹⁶ Taylor, A.J., (1968) "The Coal Industry" in Aldcroft, D.H., (ed.) *The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition, 1875-1914, Studies in Industrial Enterprise*, Allen and Unwin, p. 65.

¹⁷ Kirby, *Op. cit.* p. 12.

The Scottish coal-mining industry was predominantly financed through personal sources from within the industry itself. It was heavily dependent for capital upon funds provided by the coal-owners themselves, their families and friends, supplemented by credit from the coal trade and by bank loans. In time, competition for trade and market fluctuations were such that private sources of funds became inadequate to cover the industry's costs. Coal companies needed financial resources to expand and re-invest in the industry. The foundation of Limited Companies, following the companies acts of 1863, 1869 and 1884, afforded coal-owners the opportunity to increase company reserves by selling shares in the company on the financial market, whilst maintaining control by purchasing the majority of shares themselves.¹⁸ By the 1890s most existing companies were converted to limited company status and were open to investment and speculation on the share market.

While this provided companies with funds to invest in the maintenance of output, it also ultimately led to dependence upon the financial market. Private investors, often small shareholders, were usually cautious. Small and large investors alike were unwilling to invest their savings on the promise of an eventual return. Investors were encouraged to invest if a firm had a good reputation and showed regular profits. The necessity to predict and respond to the vagaries of the financial market increased pressure for profit and regular share dividends. In a period of booming industrialisation coal companies were expected to be able to predict future output and project future profit levels in order to attract investment. If a coal company was not

¹⁸ 1863 Companies Clauses Act, 26 & 27 Vict. c. 118; 1869 Companies Clauses Act, 32 & 33 Vict. c. 48; 1884 Chartered Companies Act, 47 & 48 Vict. c. 56.

competitive in times of market crisis, it could not ride out the recession and inevitably collapsed.

In such an economic climate, the necessity to remain competitive put pressure on companies to cut costs and to save on expenditure. Saving labour costs through wage reduction was a popular and regularly used means of doing so. In time, with the introduction of the minimum wage, it became increasingly difficult to cover trade losses with savings in labour costs. Coal companies looked to other methods of saving. Reducing company expenditure on the erection and maintenance of housing stock was viewed by late nineteenth century coal-mining companies as another means of reducing company costs. It will be shown in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 that from then on, coal companies were increasingly reluctant to erect new houses or to maintain and improve conditions in existing housing stock.

2.3. The origins and history of coal production in Fife.

The situation in Fife at the end of the nineteenth century is similar in many ways to that of the great northern coalfield of Durham and Northumberland, as outlined in Chapter 1. Coal extraction was well established in Fife with a history dating back to the medieval period. Indeed records of coal extraction in Fife date as far back as the twelfth century.¹⁹ Such early accounts are rare, but by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries coal extraction had become a profitable enterprise. In 1408, Henry, Earl of Orkney, dug coal from the Dysart main seam which outcropped on the shore near

¹⁹ Cunningham, A.S., (1913) *Mining in the Kingdom of Fife: History of the Industry from Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Romanes, Dunfermline, p. 13.

Dysart.²⁰ In 1428, David Wemyss, Laird of Methil and part owner of Wemyss entered into an agreement concerning coal and salt manufacture with relatives which suggests that considerable business in these commodities was being carried out at the time. In 1526, Hector Boece, Principal of Aberdeen University, whose "History" of Scotland was published in 1527, commented that while touring the kingdom of Fife some of the outcropping coal was being set aside by smiths for non-domestic use, i.e. to melt iron.²¹

In coastal Fife coal extraction was associated with the production of salt using a distillation process. Six tons of coal were needed to produce one ton of salt.²² A dozen saltpans operated at West Wemyss alone. By the end of the seventeenth century the saltpans along the shores of the Firth and Forth were consuming as much as 150,000 tons of coal per annum.²³ At this time Fife, East Lothian, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire were the principal coal producing areas of Scotland. A flourishing export trade from the Forth to Amsterdam and Hamburg was carried out by Dutch shippers encouraged by low duties charged on the export of Scottish coal. Coal was also used as ballast on the outward journey for ships bringing raw materials to Scotland.²⁴ Fife's coastal location was extremely advantageous to the coal-mining industry as it gave coal operators easy access to the continental market.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The Chronicles of Scotland; compiled by Hector Boece and translated into Scots by John Billender 1531: cited in Cunningham, A.S., *op. cit.* p. 10.

²² Hamilton, H., *op. cit.* p. 185.

²³ Nef, J.U., (1932) *Op. cit.* pps. 19, 42, 48-49, 201-208, and Cunningham, A.S., *Op. cit.* p. 16.

²⁴ Smith, A., *Op. cit.* p. 232.

The local Fife industry developed and increased operations following the innovations of the industrial revolution and the expansion of the overseas market. Along with the rest of Scotland Fife's coal output increased dramatically in the years following 1830. Between 1854 and 1914 production increased from 7.4 million tons to 38.8 million tons; representing a rise from 11.5% to 14.8% of national U.K. output.

Until the second half of the nineteenth century most of Fife's working mines were located along outcropping and shallow seams of coastal east Fife or inland west Fife. In the early 1870s new deep and rich seams of coal were discovered along the coast in the parish of Wemyss and in the Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly areas of west Fife. More efficient methods of extracting coal were then being explored and new markets opened up with increasing urban populations and demand for coking coal for iron smelting. Export to the Baltic continued with greater trade opportunities brought about by the continental slump in production during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. Fife was particularly dependent upon exporting its coal as nearly half of the county's output went overseas. In this Fife was exceptional not only in Scotland, but also in relation to the whole of the U.K. The figure for national Scottish coal exports was only slightly higher than that of the whole of the United Kingdom. Between 1895 and 1900 18.88% of Scotland's coal output was exported, whereas for the same period 17.76% of national U.K. output went overseas.²⁵ As a result of this dependence upon the continental market Fife did not escape the effects of the resumption in production on the European mainland; the slide in prices of the late 1870s led to the closure of

²⁵ Campbell, R.H., *Op. cit.* p. 241.

several Fife collieries. At the time the coal mining industry employed only a fraction of those engaged in farming and linen manufacture. In 1870 only 4,500 people were employed in the Fife coal industry, with an annual output of 150,000 tons of coal.

Nevertheless the overall trend was towards expansion with markets opening up throughout Britain and on the continent. By 1914 output had risen to 10,000,000 tons and nearly 30,000 people were employed in the industry. 1913 was the peak year of coal production in Fife. The problem for Fife was that European coalfields also increased production which heightened competition for the export market.

In the late nineteenth century the Fife coal-mining industry, as elsewhere in Britain, was dominated by the "family firm". Coal companies were run by long established firms which operated in the locality on a small scale, often with only three or four pits in operation at one time. These family run coal companies often owned land and mineral rights. Land proprietors often worked the minerals themselves or they leased mineral rights to other landed proprietors or private individuals. They always retained a financial interest in their minerals and hence always had a stake in the development of the industry. Proprietors of land played an important part in the development of the Scottish Coal-mining industry. Some worked their own minerals directly, but, the usual practice from the eighteenth century onwards was for the landowner to lease the right to extract minerals from his land to individuals or partnerships. Legal rights were made over to these coal operators while the proprietor retained a financial interest in the extraction operation. One of the strongest and oldest of these family firms was the Wemyss Coal Company. The Wemyss family were proprietors of the barony of Wemyss in coastal south east Fife.

In 1874, the beginning of the period under review, there were forty coal companies operating forty five collieries in Fife [Table 2.1]. By 1930, at the end of the period, the industry was dominated by three companies; the Fife Coal Company Ltd., the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company Ltd., and the Wemyss Coal Company. Together they accounted for over 80% of Fife coal production. The Fife Coal Company alone was responsible for 50% of annual output from fifteen collieries. The Lochgelly and Wemyss companies had four collieries each.

The largest of these firms, the Fife coal company was established in 1873, and prospered by means of a process of amalgamation and take over of smaller companies. By 1911 the company employed over 10,000 workers and had an annual output of over two million tons.²⁶ Such large foundations as this, although highly successful, nonetheless remained exceptions to the rule well into the twentieth century.

2.4. Industrial relations in the Scottish coal-mining industry during the nineteenth century.

"The classic mining community of the late nineteenth century took its structure - indeed it took its 'community' - from the associations and conflicts of work, culture and protest, From the 1860s pit village 'community' or lack of it, came to be defined precisely in these terms - schools, reading rooms, lecture halls, cooperative stores, workers' organisations. The pit village was an overwhelmingly proletarian place based upon a glaring division of labour and capital."²⁷

²⁶ Muir, A., (1958) *The Fife Coal Company Limited, A Short History*, Fife Coal Company, Leven, p. 8

²⁷ Colls, R., (1987) *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield; Work, Culture and Protest, 1790-1850*, Manchester University Press, pps. 305-306.

Colls' remarks on life in the pit villages of County Durham could equally apply to Fife coal-mining communities in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The provision and maintenance of company housing and changing attitudes of owners and tenants to tied housing was a primary factor in social relations in coal-mining communities. Before attempting to consider change in social relations in Parts II and III, it is important to give an account of the Scottish trade union movement as it played an important role in agitation for improvements in housing and changes in the management of the industry, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It is in the context of the legacy of collier serfdom and the traditions of the independent collier that the following account of the origins and development of the Scottish trade union movement must be viewed. The independent colliers, the descendants of collier serfs, represented the pre-industrial organisation of industry, which conflicted with capitalist views of the management of labour and productivity. As a result nineteenth century Scottish miners and coal owners were in a state of constant struggle for control of labour. Power however inevitably lay with the coal owners as they controlled miners' earnings. Conflicts between miners and owners initially revolved around wages, but gradually evolved to include all aspect of working conditions, including housing. Social and industrial relations were inextricably linked in Scottish mining communities, and therefore the one cannot be studied without reference to the other.

This section of chapter two gives a brief and introductory account of the

unionisation of the mining workforce in Scotland and later throughout Britain. The purpose of the section is neither to provide a detailed nor analytical account of the development of Scottish trade unionism, but rather the background to conflict between miners and managers and between miners and the government over the issue of housing conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities.

The trade union movement was the most powerful and effective lobby for change in the provision of company housing from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. However, before unity and cohesion were attained in the late nineteenth century the movement was beset with problems of inefficiency and credibility which inhibited its ability to act as an effective representative of the industry's workers.

"Individual workers were weak in the face of established economic and political forces. The *raison d'être* of the labour movement was to create new forms of power to enable workers collectively to realise aims and aspirations which as individuals they were too weak to achieve. This required solidarity. Only through shared loyalties and common action could workers hope to challenge and defeat their powerful and well-organised opponents".²⁸

These words were written to explain industrial relations in the Ruhr of Germany during the latter years of the nineteenth century, they could however, equally apply to the efforts of the Scottish trade union movement to consolidate and unite during the same period. The struggle for power was central to the labour movement throughout Europe. Although miners were long known for their strong ties to community and place, collective action was not always easy to attain.

²⁸ Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany, The Miners of the Ruhr*, Clarendon, Oxford, p. 30.

As outlined in chapter 1 Scottish coal-miners were bonded to their place of work by a contractual system generally described as "collier serfdom" until the emancipation acts of 1775 and 1799. From then on free labour was available on the open market. The ending of the bondage system did not however result in the influx of workers wished for and anticipated by Scottish coal-owners. Instead miners remained separate from the rest of society, a situation which was derived from bondage and the isolation of mining communities.²⁹ The industry as a result became dominated by the "independent collier"; the descendant of the bonded miner who determined his own output, organisation of work and time spent at the workplace. Miners wages were paid according to piecework and varied considerably from district to district. The amount earned depended upon a miner's age, position in the working hierarchy, and experience. A miner's output could be limited by himself, by mutual agreement with fellow colliers or unlimited within a specific time period.³⁰ These highly skilled and independent men retained strong traditions of loyalty to the locality and the community, which became manifest in suspicion of outsiders and new ideas.

The legacy of pre-industrial social relations of production (collier serfdom, described in the previous chapter) and the ethos of the independent Scottish collier, hindered the formation of a national trade union movement. The

²⁹ The isolation of colliers from the rest of society is disputed by Whatley, C.A., (1987) in "The Fettering Bonds of Brotherhood: Combination and Labour Relations in the Scottish Coal-mining Industry c. 1690-1775", *Social History*, Vol. 12, pps. 139-154.

³⁰ Bremner, D., (1969) *The Industries of Scotland: Their Rise, Progress and Present Condition [1869]*. Reprinted by David and Charles Reprints, Devon, p. 21.

recruitment of labour from outside coal-mining communities from the 1830s onwards by the Scottish coal and iron masters further hindered unity among the workers. The employment of "outside labour" was prompted by the need for greater coal production to take advantage of an expanding trade market. New labourers were recruited from a pool of highland and Irish migrant peasantry and the unemployed of the declining handloom weaving industry. Coal-owners took advantage of the availability of such labour in an open and free market. Once collier "serfdom" was abolished in 1799 there was no hindrance to the recruitment of labour from outside coal-mining communities.

Traditional colliers reacted with hostility to new labourers. Scottish colliers spent years from childhood in apprenticeship to the craft of coal hewing in order to acquire the necessary skill and experience to work alone at the coal-face. They regarded the introduction of outside labour as a threat to their independence. It also reduced their status from that of skilled craftsmen to that of unskilled labourers. One of the reverberations of the recruitment of outside labour was the end of the monopoly of the independent colliers who regulated their own output and hours of work.

Resentment between traditional colliers and new labourers was exacerbated by differences in ethnic origin and religious tension. Religious tension in particular was often manipulated to the benefit of the employers. The situation was further aggravated by rivalry between long established collieries and between coal-mining districts. Paternalistic coal companies had over several generations fostered a strong sense of local identity and loyalty to the colliery and the company. In these circumstances concerted trade union activity often only occurred at a local level.

A recurring problem for the union during the nineteenth century was the lack of central funds to support striking miners. With each strike failure therefore the union lost its support base. Popularity of the union also fluctuated with the rise and fall in wages. The first attempt at national unity was the foundation of the Miners Association of Great Britain in 1841. This lasted only until 1847 and was not succeeded until 1852 with the foundation of the Scottish Miners' Association formed "for the protection of the miners' rights and privileges, by providing funds to support members out of work".³¹ In 1855 the Coal and Iron Miners Association was formed largely through the efforts of Alexander MacDonald. This was the first association to apply a levy to each member. Nonetheless it remained a success only so long as its members could afford to pay union dues. With the decline in wages in 1859 to less than three shillings a day, fewer than 1,500 of the Scottish membership of 10,000 were paying regular dues. District union organisation was revived in 1862 but had fallen apart by the end of the year with another wage cut and a failure of strike action. The intermittent fortunes and successes of the Scottish miners' union continued throughout the 1860s.

Output and prices fell constantly during the 1870s and coal-owners began to agitate for reductions in wages which accounted for between 65% and 75% of coal mining costs.³² Arbitration failed in the 1870s as the arbiters felt they had no alternative but to grant coal-owners wage reductions in the face of falling prices. As a result Scottish coal-miners lost confidence in, and refused

³¹ Bremner, D., *Op. cit.* p. 25.

³² Rowe, J.W.F., (1923) *Wages in the Coal Industry, Studies in Economic and Political Science*, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, pps. 119-120.

to support, a system of wage arbitration that ultimately led to a reduction in their income. Wages continued to fall throughout the mid and late 1870s with a fall in the selling price of coal. Continental production resumed in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war. In the situation where export prices were in decline coal-owners again sought to cut labour costs by either reducing wages or cutting back on working shifts.

The failure of arbitration was followed by the introduction of the selling price sliding scale. The principle behind the scale was that a base year was chosen, and thereafter changes in wages were calculated by reference to a given percentage change for each change in selling price.³³ This method of wage negotiation had the support of coal owners as wage agreements could be revoked at short notice. It was also supported by the miners as they presumed that it would ensure greater stability in wages. The assumption behind the scale was that trade expansion would be followed by automatic wage increases, while in times of recession wages would be protected by the base rate. In reality the sliding scale enabled colliery owners to recoup losses in price by reducing wages.³⁴

Fluctuation in wages continued into the 1880s. Meanwhile it gradually became clear to the mining community that reductions in their income during trade recession did not lead to recovery in trade and coal prices, and therefore the burden of depression was borne by them and not coal-owners.³⁵ To improve deteriorating relations between miners and coal-

³³ Porter, J.H., (1970) "Wage Bargaining under Conciliation Agreements, 1860-1914" *Economic History Review, Second Series*, 23, p. 468.

³⁴ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 13.

³⁵ Porter, J.H. (1971) "Wage Determination by Selling Price Sliding Scales 1870-1914" *The Manchester School* 34, pps. 13-21

owners district conciliation boards were formed in the 1880. These too had the support of the miners as they anticipated that district boards would not use the sliding scale as a means of settling wages. Coal-owners on the other hand, hoped that conciliation boards would improve labour relations.

Following a series of successful wage negotiations with district boards the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was founded in 1889. This marked the beginning of national collective bargaining in a regional framework.³⁶ Nevertheless, local associations often retained autonomy by refusing to affiliate to the MFGB. The revival of the union was largely due to the efforts of Keir Hardie. Hardie was secretary of the Miners National Federation which was founded in 1886. This union had 23,570 members, each of whom paid half a penny a month towards central funds. The MFGB, founded in 1889 was followed by the foundation of the Scottish Miners Federation in 1894. This union comprised all the existing district organisations bar one, and had 36,783 members at its inception. In the same year all of Scotland's coal-miners were simultaneously on national strike for the first time. However, it became evident during the strike that unofficial shop floor organisation was a more potent factor than union organisation, as the majority of those on strike were not members of the union.

Despite all of the organisational problems associated with unification, miners gradually became the best integrated of the Scottish labour force. From the 1860s to the 1890s Scottish miners played a central role in British labour agitation and provided the labour movement with two of its greatest leaders; Alexander MacDonald and Keir Hardie. Throughout the same

³⁶ Burgess, K., (1975), *The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience*. p. 202

period Scottish coal-owners became more and more remote from their workers and often adopted a confrontational stance in labour relations. Scottish coal-owners refused to recognise the miners union until the 1880s.

2.5. Labour relations 1900-1926.

The early years after 1900 were years of overall growth. Nevertheless average prices per pithead varied considerably. In the "boom" year of 1900 the average pithead selling price of coal was 10s. 10d. per ton. This fell to 6s. 11d. in 1905 and rose again to 9s. in 1907. Prices fell again in 1908 to 8s. 1d. and by 1913 it had rises again to 10s. 2d.³⁷ Fluctuations in pithead prices led in turn to fluctuations in wages. While wages were falling the cost of living was all the while rising. Increasing pressure on costs through government intervention in the form of Home Office safety regulations (1902), legislation for workers compensation (1897 and 1907), a coal export tax introduced in 1901 but revoked in 1906, the Eight Hours Act (1909), also influenced coal-owners in wage negotiation. The principle of intervention was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century with Lord Ashley's Mines Act of 1842, which prohibited the employment of women and girls underground, followed by the appointment of a mines inspectorate. All of these measures were introduced in opposition to coal owners. Coal companies found it difficult to come to terms with what they perceived as interference from the government. Later, in the early years of the twentieth century they found the miners moves towards socialism and radicalism almost incomprehensible.

³⁷ Neuman, A.M., (1934) *Economic Organisation of the British Coal Industry*, London, p. 39.

Once the government intervened it was inevitable that it would become more concerned with labour relations and management of the industry. It was also inevitable that miners would turn to the government for industry wide regulation. By 1914 the safety and welfare of miners, together with wages and hours of work were the direct concern of Parliament.

The Eight Hours Act passed in 1909 had been an objective of the MFGB since its foundation and was regarded by miners as a matter of social justice.³⁸ The act did however lead to difficulties, especially for those working in so-called "abnormal places". It was often difficult for these miners to cut their quota of coal in the allowed time, leading to a loss in wages. The abnormal places issue provided the basis for the miners long standing demand for a minimum wage. The union claimed that wages should be "made up" if they were below normal as a result of abnormal natural conditions. In 1911 the MFGB issued a demand for an individual minimum wage, which was reinforced by the threat of a national strike in the next year.

The Scottish Coal-owners Association, the Northumberland and Durham owners and the South Wales owners were opposed to the principle of a minimum wage. Both sides remained implacable, despite the intervention of the Liberal government when Prime Minister Asquith pledged "a reasonable minimum wage for underground workers". Thus began the strike of 1912, the first ever national coal stoppage, when one million miners struck work for six weeks. The importance of the strike lay in the fact that it confirmed that the MFGB could organise and sustain a national strike; and a national strike was shown to be capable of reeking national economic havoc.

³⁸ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 15.

The result was that Parliament in accordance with Asquith's pledge, accepted that miners working underground were entitled to a minimum wage. However, only the principle was sanctioned. Legislation that followed did not stipulate what the minimum wage should be. This was to be left to the Joint Districts Board established under the Act.

Events during the First World War further intensified government involvement in the management of the coal-mining industry. Coal-mining was of great strategic importance to the economy and to the war effort. As the war progressed the need for sustained output and productivity increased. This enhanced the miners bargaining position. At the start of the war government policy was to rely on private enterprise and the laws of supply and demand. By 1915 however it had become clear that the war was not going to be short lived, and control of industrial production assumed primary importance. The Munitions of War Act of 1915 marked a "considerable extension of the government's powers of economic control" over large sections of industry.³⁹ Nonetheless initial involvement was tentative. The Coal-mining Organisation Committee, set up in 1915, was an advisory body only, with no statutory powers. It did however include representatives from both sides of the industry as the government recognised that the full support of the miners was necessary to secure maximum coal production.⁴⁰

Early in 1915 general price inflation was a sensitive issue for miners who

³⁹ Pollard, S., (1969) *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967*. pps. 44-45.

⁴⁰ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 25.

were keenly aware that coal-owners were raking in large profits. The Price of Coal (Limitation) Act was an attempt by the government to diffuse the situation by limiting the rate of inflation of coal prices and hence overall inflation. Nevertheless in March 1915 the MFGB issued a demand for a wage increase of 20% to meet the rising cost of living. They were turned down as the Mining Association claimed it was not empowered to negotiate national pay levels. Asquith, again forced to intervene, accepted the miners arguments for an advance, but also gave in to pressure from coal-owners by insisting that the amount of the increase should be decided on a district basis. Asquith's arbitration effectively upheld the principle of district wage settlement as outlined in the Minimum Wage Act.

Later that year Lloyd George, before his appointment to the Ministry of Munitions, negotiated the Treasury Agreement, whereby all trade union rules in the munitions industry were suspended for the duration of the war. Compulsory arbitration was invoked and the unions involved agreed to forgo the right to strike. The MFGB initially refused to be bound by the agreement, but later agreed to the appointment of an independent chairman with powers to settle deadlock disputes.⁴¹ This was followed in the Autumn of 1916 by the imposition of State control over the coal-mining industry, under the Defence of the Realm Act. This was an attempt to remove the threat to coal supply posed by labour unrest.

In theory State control, administered by the government Coal Controller in the Board of Trade, was expected to improve the industry's efficiency through the planning and co-ordination of production. In reality the overall

⁴¹ Kirby, M.W., *op. cit.* p. 27.

efficiency of the industry deteriorated during the war years. Demand for coal from the war effort, drainage of skilled miners to the war-front and difficulties in obtaining machinery, all mitigated against efficiency and improvements in productivity.

According to Kirby, the significance of State control lay in its effect upon the miners.⁴² The Control Agreement Act initiated a pooling agreement whereby exporting collieries subsidised those dependent upon the inland market. Once profits were equalised on a national basis the Mining Association could no longer claim that a national wage agreement was impossible because of the different financial strengths of the districts. Until the end of control in March 1921 the government conceded a national uniform wage increase.⁴³ For the first time too, as a result of representation on the Advisory Board to the Coal Controller, and membership of pit committees, miners were playing a part in the management of the industry. They believed that control represented an irreversible advance in their position. As a result the introduction of coal control gave considerable impetus to the MFGB's aspiration towards nationalisation.⁴⁴

Another significant aspect of State control was that it reflected the government's attitude to labour relations at the time. From 1916 onwards miners were treated exceptionally. They were exempted from the Munitions of War Act and received a uniform national wage increase. All of this was

⁴² Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 39.

⁴⁴ This aspiration was first voiced in the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire coalfields in the 1880s. A resolution in favour of State control was considered at the 1894 annual conference of the MFGB. Thereafter the principal of nationalisation gained increasing support.

done because the government believed in the miners' power and ability to mount a national stoppage.

The cessation of World War I hostilities in November 1918 did not mark the end of State control of the coal-mining industry. In the short term it was in the government's interest to maintain it. Price regulation applied only to coal destined for the inland market and allied countries, thereby containing the increase in the cost of living. Meanwhile coal earned as much as possible on the export market. The Mining Association pressed for de-control in the aftermath of the war. Coal-owners regarded the war as an exceptional and temporary event and believed that the sooner pre-war management and organisation were reinstated the better. On the other hand the MFGB viewed the war as a catalyst that added impetus to their demands for national wage agreements and nationalisation of the industry.

Meanwhile the government was anxious to return control of the industry to the industrialists as soon as it was economically propitious to do so. Since the principal parties involved adopted opposing positions it was continually forced to intervene in order to avert national strikes. The government responded to MFGB demands for nationalisation by (a) giving an immediate wage increase from 3s. to 4s. a day and (b) appointing a commission of enquiry to consider the Union's demands.⁴⁵ The enquiry (known as the Sankey Commission) had the status of a Royal Commission and had power to compel witnesses to attend and to produce relevant documents. Although the MFGB initially rejected the offer it later agreed to participate in the Commission and to suspend strike action.

⁴⁵ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 36.

The appointment of the Commission is regarded as a cunning move by Lloyd George to avert national unrest and to reject nationalisation.⁴⁶ Six of the Commission's thirteen members were nominated by the MFGB, while six others represented the interests of coal-owners and industry. The final member, the Chairman John Sankey, was a Judge. It was anticipated that the final report could not be unanimous and would therefore give the government the excuse to reject its recommendations. In the end the majority report, presented in March 1919, favoured nationalisation of the industry. The government however declined to implement its recommendations.

According to Kirby the Sankey Commission played a decisive role in what he refers to as the "foiling of labour".⁴⁷ It diverted energies away from strike action and bought the government time to dissipate the power of the miners' union. The Commission's failure to gain the government's commitment to nationalisation had a detrimental effect on industrial relations throughout the 1920s. Nevertheless, the Sankey Commission assured the question of nationalisation a place on the political agenda and afforded the MFGB the opportunity to publicise its point of view. It will be shown in Chapter 10 that the MFGB presented considerable evidence on housing conditions in Scottish mining communities and that they convincingly linked poor management of company housing with poor management of the industry.

In the aftermath of the Sankey Commission the Mining Association continued to press for de-control of the industry while the MFGB continued

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 47.

in its opposition. The government was under considerable pressure to terminate subsidies to the industry from the Treasury and, despite the threat of a national strike, decided to end control on 31 March 1921. The Mining Association immediately demanded a return to district wage bargaining, their argument being that since the industry was no longer guaranteed a profit mining districts would again be in competition with one another. Inter-district rivalry, as in the pre-war situation, was a guaranteed way of destroying the negotiating power of the MFGB.⁴⁸

The conflict that followed led to the national strike of 1921. The build-up to the strike has been described by Armitage as a "tangle of misunderstandings" in which all parties involved miscalculated.⁴⁹ The coal-owners miscalculated because they assumed that the MFGB would give up national wage agreements easily; the government believed that wage reductions would be limited; and the miners believed that the government would come to their aid in order to avoid a national stoppage.⁵⁰

The Triple Industrial Alliance; the MFGB, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Transport Workers Federation (TWF), gave considerable strength to the miners' position. The solution was again a compromise, orchestrated again by Lloyd George; national settling of district wage rates with a temporary subsidy for unprofitable districts to facilitate a gradual reduction in wages and the negotiation of a permanent settlement.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 47.

⁴⁹ Armitage, S.M.H., (1969) *The Politics of Decontrol of Industry: Britain and the United States*, cited in Kirby, M.W. (1977) p. 58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 60.

The MFGB initially rejected the solution but were ultimately forced to agree after the dispute had dragged on from April to July 1921.

Coal prices revived in the early 1920s. In particular exports to the United States and markets usually served by the U.S. increased because of a sixteen week strike there in 1922. The military occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 also reduced exports from there and afforded the British industry more export opportunities. With record exports, profits rose, followed by wage increases throughout mining districts. By 1925 however, exports were again falling. Demands for flexibility in production costs inevitably led to demands for wage cuts. The Mining Association again pressed for the termination of the national minimum wage and were resisted by the MFGB. The minority Labour government was forced to intervene to avert another national strike. The government agreed to re-introduce subsidies and to appoint yet another Royal Commission to investigate the industry.

The Royal Commission was appointed in September 1925 and constituted only four members. Unlike the Sankey Commission of 1919 none of the members were involved in the industry. The Chairman, Sir Herbert Samuel was a Liberal politician; Sir William Beveridge, Director of the London School of Economics and also Liberal; Kenneth Lee was Chairman of a cotton company; and Sir Herbert Lawrence was a managing partner in a banking firm. Unlike the 1919 Commission this one was designed specifically to produce a unanimous report.

The Report, presented in March 1926, outlined the industry's weak market position and poor prospects. The only solution put forward to improve long-term prospects was the amalgamation of collieries. The Commission however rejected the MFGB position that this could only be achieved

through State ownership. Instead it recommended a degree of limited control through amalgamation by compulsion. The Commission also recommended the end of subsidy payments which meant that losses in some areas would again lead to wage reduction.⁵² The government accepted the Commission's Report but was undecided on how to implement its recommendations. Agreement between the MFGB and the Mining Association did not follow. The miners refused wage reduction without drastic reorganisation of the industry. The national lockout of 1926 followed with support from the whole trade union movement.

The General Strike of 1926 began on 3 May with national support from other trade unionists to the extent that on 11 May there were in the region of four million men on strike. By then however the resolve of the TUC had begun to weaken. Anxious for a settlement they agreed to call off the general strike in favour of a proposed settlement with the miners devised by Sir. Herbert Samuel, former Chairman of the 1925 Royal Commission. The MFGB refused to accept the Samuel proposals as they included wage reductions. By the end of May it was clear that neither the miners nor the owners were going to abandon their positions. As a result the miners strike lasted for another seven months until 23 December 1926.

The miners were ultimately defeated, not because of their unwillingness to resist the coal-owners, but because the government was unwilling to force the coal-owners to make an offer the miners could accept. In the end, after more than a half year without work, mining communities were starved into submission. While the strike resulted in financial and organisational

⁵² Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 77.

collapse for the MFGB it reaffirmed the coal-owners and government commitment to pre-war industrial organisation. It was not until the depression of the 1930s that the Mining Association and the government were faced with the reality that coal-mining could not remain competitive without drastic reorganisation.

2.6. The union and Fife miners.

In 1869 Bremner wrote that in Fife and the Lothians relations between master and servant were little disturbed by strikes or fluctuations in trade and that;

“The miners are superior in every respect to the same class in Lanarkshire and the West of Scotland generally. This arises from the fact that, while the eastern miners are almost without exception Scotsmen, whose forefathers for several generations have followed the same avocation in the same locality, a great proportion of those in the West of Scotland are Irishmen, mostly of a rough type”.⁵³

He went on to state that “In the East of Scotland, wages did not fluctuate as much as in other quarters. An understanding seems to prevail between the men and their employers which allows the work to go on steadily, no matter what the state of the coal market is.”⁵⁴ Later still he added that “the relationship between the East of Scotland miners and their employers have been little disturbed by disputes as to work or wages”.⁵⁵ It appears from these remarks that relations between coal-owners and miners in Fife were amicable at the beginning of the period under review. Whether or not this

⁵³ Bremner, D., *Op. cit.* pps. 20-21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 24.

was a result of the fact that the miners were all Scotsmen and not Irishmen is a debatable point! The more likely causes of good relations were the strong traditions and legacy of collier serfdom described in Chapter 1.

The trade union movement among Fife colliers grew and consolidated slowly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Once the union was established in Fife however, it rapidly took a firm foothold. By the early twentieth century the Fife Branch Union was one of the strongest in Scotland and its members were leading activists in the struggle for improvements in housing conditions. By the 1920s west Fife in particular was known as a stronghold of radical trade unionism. This section of the chapter briefly traces the deterioration in relations of production between Fife miners and coal-owners during the period 1870-1930. In the 1870s paternalism and deference still thrived in Fife while by the strike of 1926 relations had deteriorated to the extent that coal companies were evicting miners from their homes and blacklisting troublesome elements in the workforce. (See Chapters 5 and 6 for information on paternalism and deference.)

In the early years of trade union activity Fife miners were little involved. Activity was instead concentrated in the West of Scotland where most of the mines were relatively recent foundations. In the 1850s however, the union began to spread into the eastern coalfield. The Coal and Iron Miners Association founded in 1855 had branches in Fife, Midlothian, Ayr, Renfrew, Stirling and West Lothian.

The "Free Colliers" or "Free Miners" movement was popular in Fife in the 1860s. The "order" of free colliers was fundamentally a friendly society which occasionally became involved in industrial or political action. The

movement's origins lay in emancipation of the collier serfs in 1799, and was based on the ideals of the independent collier. Lodges of free colliers were active throughout the 1860s and took the place of the union when in decline. The movement's activities were largely social however; dances, outings and parades where sashes were worn and banners carried. These manifestations, have been described as the "cultural trappings of growing community consciousness, or even class consciousness".⁵⁶ The essential function of the movement however was not to raise class consciousness but rather to provide welfare benefits through death and accident funds and financial support for sick miners. These activities represent a move towards independence and self control and away from the deference and paternalism whereby coal-owners provided for all of the miners social and welfare needs.

The miners' national union was opposed to the free collier movement as its activities were tinged with anti-Catholic sectarianism. The movement was therefore a threat to national unity among all mine workers. With the resurgence of interest in the union in the late 1860s, lodges of the free collier movement gradually petered out and their functions taken over by district unions.

In 1869 the Fife and Clackmannan Miners Association was formed in response to the foundation of the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association the previous year. On 5 June 1870 an eight hour working day was secured by the Shorter Working Hours Movement of the Fife district union. Fife was the first coalfield in Europe to win this concession. With this victory the union gained a firm foothold in Fife. The Fife and Clackmannan Association was founded the following year.

⁵⁶ Gregory, R., (1968), *The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914*, Oxford, pps. 14-15, cited in Kirby, M.W. *Op. cit.* p. 20.

The eight hour day was commemorated by an annual gala for the next 75 years. For the first of these, held in 1871, the Union Board of Fife sent the following letter of invitation to the coal owners of Fife;

"We the miners of Fife kindly invite all our masters to come to our meeting on this occasion. By their complying with this invitation, it will be but hastening the time that is not far distant, when master and servant shall meet on one common platform to settle the differences that exist between us".⁵⁷

While it is said that no coal owners attended the gala, at least in Kirkcaldy, the invitation is of significance in that as with Bremner above, the rhetoric of collier serfdom was still in use in 1870; coal owners were the "masters" and miners their "servants". This indicates the strength of paternalism and deference at the time and that, while "dabbling" in trade unionism, Fife miners did not conceive of a situation where they and their "masters" would not work together to mutual benefit.

Despite paternalism and deference the Fife union went from strength to strength in the latter quarter of the century. These were the years when mining operations expanded throughout the county, particularly in west Fife. Between 1850 and 1914 the population of some west Fife mining villages increased twenty-fold.⁵⁸ Many of the miners in the new pits came from older mining areas in the Lothians and Lanarkshire. It is possible that the spread and success of the union in Fife is attributable to the arrival of

⁵⁷ Arnot, R.P., (1955) *A History of the Scottish Miners from the Earliest Times*, Allen and Unwin, London, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Macintyre, S., (1980) *Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*, Croom Helm, London, p. 48.

these new inhabitants.

In the crisis years of the 1870s when wages fell constantly between 1874 and 1879, the union lost its foothold throughout Scotland except for the eastern coalfields of Fife and the Lothians. It is also interesting that Alexander MacDonald, the leader of the miners union, was popular in Fife throughout his career and remained so even when he lost support in other mining districts.

In 1876 a suggestion of a wage cut by the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association was met by a threat to strike from the miners union. The Fife Union Board formed a deputation and met with the coal-owners. As a result the proposed wage cut was halved from 15% to 7.5%. In December 1877 a further wage cut proposed by the owners was again met by resistance from the Fife and Clackmannan miners. The cause of the dispute was a wage cut of 10% and the threat of the imposition of rent for company houses and charges for domestic coal in Clackmannan. The miners' principal objection was that a minimum wage had not been set. The ensuing confrontation was described in the *Glasgow Sentinel* as "masters and men stand to each other in hostile attitude".⁵⁹ This strike which was the first major dispute between the miners and the federated employers lasted for fourteen weeks. Its ultimate success was not only attributable to the resolve of the local union but also to support from other union districts. The success of this strike is regarded as a landmark in the history of the miners union as it strengthened unity among Scottish miners and between them and other British colliers.

In the 1880s when union membership declined throughout Scotland, the

⁵⁹ *Glasgow Sentinel*, 12 May 1877.

Fife and Kinross Miners Association remained in operation. By then only the Fife union, with a membership of between five and six thousand men, could be described as an established union with the membership paying regular dues to the Scottish Miners National Federation.⁶⁰ During the national strike of 1894 Fife was the only mining district where two thirds of the ten thousand miners were members of the union. Elsewhere in Scotland there were two non-union miners to every member. In contrast to Lanarkshire the Fife miners were well organised and held regular joint meetings with coal owners.⁶¹ This again is an indication that reasonable relations prevailed at the time.

In the 1890s the Miners National Federation first began pressing for recognition of the poor standards of living accommodation in mining communities across Scotland. Living conditions in overcrowded company houses were a source of discontent among Fife miners from the turn of the century onwards. Fife miners were represented on all of the union deputations to the Secretary of State for Scotland. The course of these negotiations, and the build-up to the appointment of the Royal Commission on Housing in 1912, is considered in Chapter 8.

In the early years of the twentieth century the numbers employed in coal-mining grew steadily, especially in Fife and the Lothians. By 1913 there were 38% more miners than at the turn of the century. That year was also the year of peak production in Fife. Coal-mining was a highly profitable business in the county until the mid-1920s. Between 1899 and 1925 the Fife Coal

⁶⁰ Arnot, R.P., *Op cit.* p. 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 98.

Company alone paid share dividends of more than £5 million.⁶²

The Fife Coal Company led the way in the introduction of such innovations as coal-cutting machinery while coal conveyor belts were in use at Lumphinnans in West Fife at the turn of the century. After the First World War the company implemented the unification of electrical power throughout its pits.⁶³ While rendering the company's operations more efficient these new initiatives alienated older, traditional colliers.

The Communist party gained a foothold in Fife in 1920. Its success in west Fife, in particular in the village of Lumphinnans where a Little Moscow was formed in the mid 1920s, is attributable to three things; the charismatic quality and determined characters of the communist members of the local union; a reaction against the forceful characters of Fife Coal Company managers; and the fact that membership of the Fife Union was based upon place of residence and not upon place of work. Hence all of the miners living in a particular place were members of the same union, regardless of where they worked.⁶⁴ According to Macintyre the close identification of work and place of residence facilitated radicalism. Macintyre suggests that Little Moscovs "might be restricted to those coal-mining localities where a particular tradition of trade-union militancy is combined with this unusual identity of work and residence".⁶⁵ For example the villagers of Bowhill, Lumphinnans, Lochore and Glenraig all worked in nearby Fife Coal

⁶² Macintyre, S., *Op. cit.* p. 62.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 76

Company pits and were known for their militancy, whereas in larger settlements such as Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly where the association of work and home was less obvious the miners were also less radical.⁶⁶ This indicates that a change in attitude took place over time. Small mining settlements might have been expected to retain a higher degree of deference than larger communities. Yet, when radicalism was introduced to the smaller communities it was quickly adopted and wholeheartedly endorsed by the whole local population. Once radicalism gained a foothold, the size of the smaller settlements facilitated its rapid spread.

As elsewhere in Britain the failure of the 1921 strike led to a decline in union support in Fife. The Communist party took advantage of this and in 1922 the Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan Miners Reform Union was founded. For the next five years there were two unions in the county with branches in each village.⁶⁷

During the 1926 strike there was considerable ill feeling against coal-owners, in particular the Fife Coal Company. The company sent police into villages at night to harass miners into going back to work. In the third week of September 1926 the police conducted a night raid in Glenraig which resulted in several casualties. Similar clashes with the police took place at Lochore, Bowhill and Lochgelly a few days later.⁶⁸ In addition to calling in the police the Fife Coal Company served summons to remove union activists from their pits, blacklisted the mining leaders, evicted strikers from

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pps. 60-61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 55.

⁶⁸ Arnot, R.P., *Op. cit.* p. 178 and Macintyre, S., *Op. cit.* p. 62

company housing and installed blacklegs in their place. This was an attempt to destroy the link between the locality and work in the mines.⁶⁹ Evictions were common in the aftermath of the 1926 strike as coal companies were determined to remove known militants. The overcrowding that ensued and decay of the housing stock exacerbated deteriorating relations between owners and miners. Activists were asked to be "good fellows for the company" and to cease communist activities at the West Fife pits.⁷⁰ After 1926 all recognised militants were excluded from employment in Fife and Clackmannan pits.

In the aftermath of the 1926 strike the Fife Coal Company increased their use of mechanical coal-cutters and conveyors. The company also reorganised work methods and changed officials frequently. Pits that could not be modernised were closed. Between 1924 and 1927 the number of miners employed in Fife declined from 30089 to 22546. In 1931 there were only 27 pits in operation in the county as compared with 64 in 1924.⁷¹ By then housing had ceased to be a bone of contention between the miners and coal managers. Coal companies had almost completely withdrawn from the housing market and the government had taken over responsibility for housing the working class. It will be demonstrated in the third and final part of the thesis that company housing built in Fife after the First World War was erected from primarily political reasons and not because coal companies felt responsible for the welfare of their workers.

⁶⁹Macintyre, S., *Op. cit.* p 65.

⁷⁰ Arnot, R.P., *Ibid.* p, 196.

⁷¹ Macintyre, S., *Op. cit.* p. 63

2.7. Conclusion.

The years following 1870 witnessed dramatic and far-reaching changes in the whole organisation of the Scottish coal-mining industry. Competition from and trade with continental Europe dominated the development of the eastern coalfield. From then on international economics and political events on the continent affected the industry at home. Local coal-mining companies could no longer operate independently of each other. The management of the industry gradually changed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the introduction of new organisational and managerial policies. Large coal mining companies were founded.

From the 1870s onwards the "autonomous work control" of the independent collier was increasingly undermined by coal-owners, but was not completely eliminated until the early twentieth century. Mechanical coal cutting machinery for example, was not introduced until the early 1900s. The Fife Coal Company, a highly industrialised and hugely successful coal company founded in 1873, was the first to introduce coal cutting machinery in the eastern coalfield in 1905. Complex and mechanised production methods, integral to mature industrialisation, not only led to the de-skilling of the traditional colliers but also necessitated closer supervision and control of workers. Close supervision of work was viewed by miners as another affront to the independence of the traditional collier and lead to poor industrial relations.

For most of Scotland's coal-owners there was no conception of a national coal industry, despite the existence of the Mining Association of Great Britain founded in 1854 to which district organisations were affiliated. The association was not empowered to interfere in the industry's commercial organisation, but instead dealt with such issues as workers compensation

and employers liability.⁷²

Colliers, like the coal-owners, had no conception of a national industry until the late nineteenth or indeed the early twentieth century. The movement for unification among the coal-miners had to break with tradition and patterns of inherited behaviour. Many of the industry's problems stemmed from conflicting attitudes to labour. The independent Scottish collier saw himself as a craftsman contracted to a particular coal-owner and believed that he personally should regulate his own hours and output. Colliers took great pride in their skill and in close community ties with their fellow work-mates. The division of labour in Scottish collieries remained relatively undeveloped until the twentieth century.

Pre-industrial practices and attitudes to work contravened the capitalist ideology of the late nineteenth century. Industrial entrepreneurs regarded coal-miners as company "hands" and employed a labour force at fixed hours and wages. The legacy of collier serfdom was also a hindrance to the formation of a national union of miners, but not the only one. Tied housing was also an obstacle to organisation. The system of tied housing and the limited tenure it allowed was counter-productive as it encouraged dependence and inhibited collective action. Not only did paternalism and deference, fostered through the provision of workers housing, hinder effective trade union activity by cutting across loyalty to the union organisation, but tied housing was used by coal companies as an effective means of disciplining the workforce in time of trade dispute. Coal-owners could and did use eviction from company property as a weapon against union activists. The grip of the coal-owners was eventually broken as a

⁷² Mining Association of Great Britain (1924) *Historical Review of Coal Mining*, pps. 351-377.

result of a combination of factors; national trade union activity through collective bargaining, and the effects of international politics and economics.

Despite this the residual effects of pre-industrial forms of production prevailed. The new order was introduced slowly. Scottish coal-owners were notoriously conservative and suspicious of change. Tensions developed as traditional coal-owners and colliers alike were reluctant to let go of tried and trusted methods of production. On the one hand coal companies wholeheartedly embraced capitalism and the free market while on the other reluctantly introduced mechanisation and labour relations based on collective bargaining. By all accounts Scottish coal-owners were taken entirely by surprise when capitalistic organisation of work and management of labour led to conflict with the workforce. The economic climate of the late nineteenth century was such however, that social relations between coal-owners and their workers were inevitably placed under a severe strain.

Miners too clung to the past, by clinging to the traditions of the independent collier and antagonism towards outside labour. It took more than half a century for trade union ideals to take a firm foothold in Scottish mining communities. Once established however the union acted as an effective and powerful lobby for change and improvement.

By the early years of the twentieth century the union was in a position to agitate for change in working, housing and social conditions. Realising however that little would be achieved at local level from individual independent coal-owners they turned to central government as an ally in their attempts to put improvements into effect.

Table 2.1. Fife Collieries and Coal-owners in 1874.

<i>Colliery</i>	<i>Owner</i>
Hill of Beath	Adam Ord.
Cuttlehill	Henderson, Wallace and Co.
Fordell	G.W.M. Henderson.
Dunnikier	Walter Herd.
Westfield of Capeldrae	Westfield of Capeldrae Oil Co. Ltd.
Cluny	Anderson and Goodall.
Cluny	Cluny Coal Co.
Balgonie	Chas. Balfour.
Balbirnie	John Balfour.
Largoward & Lathallan	Thomas Brown.
Valleyfield	Carron Co.
Kilmux	Robert Christie.
Cluny	Cluny Coal Co.
Cowdenbeath	Cowdenbeath Coal Co.
Denend	Denend Coal Co.
Kinnedder	W. Erskine Coal Co.
Beath & Blairadam	Fife Coal Co. Ltd.
Lethans	William Frazer.
Begg	Goodall Bros.
Chapel	A. Graham & Co.
Donibristle	Grieve and Nasmyth.
Halbeath	Henderson, Wallace & Co.
Cuttlehill	Ditto.
Kingseat	Ditto.
Lassodie	Lassodie Coal Co.
Lochore & Capledrae	Lochore & Capledrae Cannel Coal Co.

Lochgelly	Lochgelly Iron and Coal Co.
Lumphinnans	Lumphinnans Iron Co.
Radernie	Thomas Lumsden.
Milton	Milton Coal Co.
Dundonald	Alex Nasmyth.
Pirnie	Pirnie Coal Co.
Dysart	Earl of Rosslyn.
Clarkestone	Scotland & Auld.
Inzievar	Shotts Iron Co.
Elgin & Wellwood	Thomas Spowart & Co.
Steeland	Steeland Coal Co.
Townhill	Townhill Coal Co.
Wemyss	Trustees of the late James Hay Erskine Wemyss.
Muircockhall	West of Fife Coal Co.
Kelly & Balcornie	A Graham Yooll.
Cameron	Bowman & Co.
Muiredge	Ditto.
Cardenden	J Goodall.
Baldrige	Mrs. Thomas Grieve.

Source : 1874 Mines Report pps. 185-204.

Chapter 3

Housing legislation and government involvement in miners' housing

" . . . legislative changes should not be treated as fixed points of historical departure, but rather as the product of societal forces. Housing legislation was, thus, the result of composite political, social and economic forces, a dependent rather than an independent variable. The danger of mentioning the legislation at all is that it then assumes a dynamic of its own."¹

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 concerns housing legislation. Despite Rodger's warning on the dangers associated with the study of legislation, the government, through legislation, played an important part in shaping and dictating home and workplace conditions for the working class. The housing and health legislation that eventually filtered through to Scottish mining communities improved the lives of miners and their families. It also put coal owners under considerable pressure to improve standards of accommodation. Scottish coal companies regarded government intervention in the housing market as interference, especially as legislation prior to the Housing Act of 1919 involved local authorities "policing" the housing situation and was geared towards pressurising property owners into improving their properties at their own cost. From the viewpoint of the coal masters the government laid down unreasonable rules and regulations without considering the cost to private enterprise.

¹ Rodger, R., (ed.) (1989) *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century*, Leicester University Press, p. 238.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the nature of government involvement in working class housing in Scotland and in particular the difficulties associated with Local Authority jurisdiction in mining districts. This information is essential background to the conflict between colliers and coal-owners over company housing considered in Part III. Again, as with Chapter 2, the treatment of the subject is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, but rather a selective consideration of the elements of housing legislation important to the thesis.

The contents of the chapter are as follows; a brief introduction to the issues that determined government involvement in working class housing, followed by detailed accounts of (a) Scottish local government; (b) problems of jurisdiction and responsibility; (c) the role of the Scottish Local Government Board; and (d) post-World War I housing legislation and miners housing. The emphasis throughout is upon housing legislation that concerned rural communities and coal company housing from the 1850s to the 1930s. Attention is given to detailing twentieth century legislation as this had a much greater impact *vis a vis* coal company housing than that which went before.

3.2. Towards government intervention

In the 1850s central government became involved in both the housing market and the coal-mining industry. In the 1860s the government took an interest in working conditions in mines and appointed inspectorates to monitor the industry. The government also became increasingly concerned with living standards, housing and sanitation conditions in the homes of the working class. Living conditions in overcrowded slums and related dangers to health forced the government to intervene and insist upon

minimum standards of building and sanitation. Emphasis tended to be placed upon the grand scale with concern for appalling living conditions in cities and large industrial towns. Private speculative builders, rather than laissez faire economic policies, were regarded as the source of poor quality housing. The vast scale of urban problems put conditions in rural areas in the shade. Rural housing, including that of agricultural labourers and migrant workers as well as miners, was largely neglected. Company provision of workers housing was ignored in housing and health legislation.

To all intents and purposes, the Scottish coal mining industry was effectively beyond the control of the State right up to the First World War, when the government took control of coal production (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5). Up to the end of the First World War company provision of housing for workers was regarded as a by-product of the industry and the sole concern of coal companies involved. Central government had no desire to interfere with private enterprise, and displayed a great reluctance to do so even when under severe pressure from the miners unions to do so (see Chapter 8). Direct government involvement was never an issue until the scale of the problem became national rather than local.

Reluctant to initiate radical change itself, the government generally took its lead from private enterprise. Many of the improvements legislated for by the government were first introduced by private philanthropic companies and organisations. The byelaws and regulations introduced by the Local Government Board in 1909, for example, were to a large extent based upon, if not direct copies of, ideas introduced by the Garden City Movement. Interest in quality housing and higher standards of home environment were fostered by the Garden City Movement from the 1890s and

undoubtedly influenced both public opinion and legislation, (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3 and Sections 3.6 and 3.7 below).

As shall be seen below Scotland had particular problems in reacting to housing legislation right up to the First World War. As a result most pre-war housing legislation was largely ineffective north of the border. The difficulties associated with local government legislation in Scotland worked in favour of the coal industry and not to the benefit of house occupiers. The government preferred not to get involved in a difficult situation and avoided direct action until the critical economic, political and social climate of the First World War forced its hand.

The next section outlines the origins of the difficulties associated with implementing housing acts in Scottish mining districts. The situation in relation to Scottish working class housing was complicated by the fact that not all national legislation applied north of the border. The usual practice was for parliament to legislate for Scotland separately. As with England and Wales however, legislation for Scotland usually only applied to urban areas. Failure to deal with the housing situation outwith these areas was a result, not only of the government's reluctance to interfere with private capital, but also of administrative and jurisdictional problems associated with local government in Scotland. Scotland's local government system was extremely complicated particularly with regard to housing in rural areas. It was usually unclear where responsibility lay for housing, health, sanitation, roads and the police. In practice it often lay with several different bodies.

3.3. *Scottish local government*

Until the end of the nineteenth century local government in Scotland comprised several effectively autonomous and independent units with often overlapping and duplicated functions. Rules for the government of cities lay in the Burgh Reform Statutes of 1833 which permitted £10 householders to elect councils.² They also provided for the adoption of a parallel "police system" whereby magistrates and police commissioners were empowered to raise rates for lighting, cleaning, water supply and drainage. Hence all of the cities and the large burghs operated their own "police acts". Building regulations in the cities were governed by the Dean of Guild Court; a mediaeval foundation which had declined in power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century but revived again in the late nineteenth century following the Lindsay Acts. Responsibility for sanitation in cities and burghs lay with the Central Board of Supervision created by the Scottish poor law of 1845.³

County areas were governed by the Commissioners of Supply which operated in the shires from 1667⁴. In the 1830s the government increased the powers of Commissioners and in 1856-57 they were given responsibility for county police.⁵ Control of the police, asylums and prisons were given directly to committees or boards which reported annually to the Commissioners.

² 1833, The General Police Acts , 3 & 4 William 4, c. 46.

³ 8 & 9 Vict. c. 117.

⁴ APS, vii, Act of Convention of 23 January 1667.

⁵ Whetstone, A.E. (1981) *Scottish Local Government in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, John Donald, Edinburgh, pps. 92-94.

Medical Officers of Health, who played an important role in monitoring housing conditions in mining communities, were appointed under the Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1867.⁶ According to this Act Local authorities were authorised to appoint sanitary inspectors. As an illustration of the difficulties of Scottish local government administration, the act was to be executed by town councils in areas within the jurisdiction of the town council and not subject to the jurisdiction of police commissioners, or of trustees executing the function of police commissioners. However, in areas under the direct control of the police commissioners the act was to be executed by them, and finally in any parish over which the jurisdiction of town councils or police commissioners did not extend, the act was to be executed by parochial boards of the parishes. Towards the end of the nineteenth century measures were taken to provide Scotland with uniform local government. A series of acts set up county councils in 1889. County councils took on many of the practices of the commission of supply, especially in relation to organisation and administration.

The union of police and municipal boundaries was facilitated under the 1892 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act; municipal boundaries were to be extended to police boundaries or police boundaries extended to municipal boundaries, whichever was appropriate.⁷ Under this act rules for the erection of new buildings were laid down. The 1892 Act was followed in 1894 by the foundation of the Scottish Local Government Board to make further provision for the local government of Scotland.⁸ The Local

⁶ 30 & 31 Vict. c. 101.

⁷ 55 & 56 Vict. c. 55.

⁸ 1894 Local Government (Scotland) Act, 57 & 58 Vict. c. 58.

Government Board was central to the history of miners housing from the turn of the twentieth century onwards.

The Scottish Local Government Board replaced the Central Board of Supervision established by the Poor Law (Scotland) Act of 1845⁹ and consisted of the following; a president, the Secretary for Scotland; the Solicitor General for Scotland and the Under Secretary for Scotland, together with three appointed members. One of these was to be appointed Vice-President and Chairman of the Board in the absence of the President, the second was to be a member of the Faculty of Advocates of not less than seven years standing and the third was to be a registered medical practitioner and holder of a diploma in sanitary science, public health or state medicine. The Board thus included the holders of highest office in Scotland and was therefore in a unique position to influence housing legislation. The 1845 act also provided for the establishment of parish councils in every parish to take the place of parochial boards. These councils had the power to form lighting and scavenging districts and to provide public baths.

The Public Health Act of 1897 rendered the Local Government Board the central authority for health and housing.¹⁰ The Board became empowered to enquire into sanitary condition, to authorise such enquiries and to appoint commissioners to carry them out. This Act effectively pulled overall control from the county councils into the Local Government Board. The act also rendered it the duty of the local authorities to inspect districts to detect the presence of "nuisances". Under the act local authorities in any

⁹ 8 & 9 Vict. c.83.

¹⁰ 60 & 61 Vict. c. 38.

district other than a burgh could, subject to the approval of the County Council, make 'bye laws' for the regulation of building or rebuilding of houses.

The process of rendering Scottish local government more efficient culminated in 1900 with the Town Council (Scotland) Act which insisted upon uniform constitutions in all burghs, under provost, baillies and elected councillors.¹¹ Despite efforts to "rationalise" local government its administration remained complex. The Local Government Board relied heavily upon local structures to implement local and national legislation. As late as 1911 a letter sent by the Board to County Councils regarding miners' housing was remitted to the parliamentary bills committee who further remitted to a sub-committee which was asked to confer with district committees. Each committee and sub-committee had to receive a report before the Local Government Board received a reply.¹²

3.4. Problems of jurisdiction and responsibility in mining districts.

Because of the difficulties of Scottish local government, the Torrens Acts of 1868, 1879, and 1892 which were the first statutes to encourage the erection of good quality housing for the working class, had little effect in Scotland. In these circumstances the problem was often not of intent but of allocating due powers of action. It was only from the 1890s that local government allowed for widespread implementation of sanitary and housing regulations. It was not until the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act of 1892 and the

¹¹ 63 & 64 Vict. c. 49.

¹² SRO WRH DD6/1170 Letter dated 11 02 1911 from Thomas Munro, County Clerk of Lanarkshire to the Secretary of the Local Government Board concerning a letter sent to County Councils on 06 12 1910.

Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1897 that the enactment and enforcement of building bye-laws became obligatory.

The Royal Commission on Housing of 1884¹³ investigated the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of earlier measures to deal with poor housing in urban centres; in particular the Torrens and Cross Housing Acts of 1868 and 1875.¹⁴ (see Table 3.1). Evidence indicated that these Acts were not widely implemented.¹⁵ The 1884 commission recommended rigorous inspection of premises for insanitary conditions and called for the consolidation of the public health acts. These suggestions were enacted in the Housing Act of 1890 which provided loans for local authorities to build houses.¹⁶ This Act gave local authorities the power to clear unhealthy areas, whilst also giving them the power to provide and manage housing themselves. The State for the first time could then intervene in the housing market. The Act was supported by Conservatives, Liberals and Labour activists alike, although a Labour recommendation that rent of such houses should be within the reach of all strata of the working class was never carried through Parliament. As a result houses allegedly erected specifically for the "working class" continued to cater primarily for artisans and skilled workers and not for the truly poor. The same complaint was later levied against the 1919 Housing Act.

¹³ Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes: Command 4402 1885.

¹⁴ 1868 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act, 31 & 32 Vict. c. 130. 1875 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement (Scotland) Act, 38 & 39 Vict. c. 49.

¹⁵ Orbach, L.F., (1977) *Homes for Heroes, A study in the Evolution of British Public Housing, 1915-1921*. Seeley Service, London, p. 38.

¹⁶ 1890 Housing of the Working classes Act, 53 & 54 Vict. c. 70.

The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 permitted all local authorities to draw up large scale planning schemes and slum clearance projects.¹⁷ In Scotland, however, it remained a "dead letter" largely due to the inability of local authorities to understand and apply the Act's regulations. The precise meaning of many of the terms concerning powers of slum clearance had to be attained through the courts to avoid multiple interpretation and conflicting action.

Despite the regulation of local government in the 1890s, the adoption by local authorities of building bye-laws and the improvements these measures brought to miners housing, twenty years later there was still much to be done. The number of unsatisfactory and even "disgracefully bad" houses was still high. All new houses were erected under building bye-laws and thereby improvements were slowly being carried out. By 1911, following the Acts of 1897 and 1909 local authorities were in a position to secure better laying out of mining villages and to prevent the erection of back-to-back housing. They also had greater powers to require closure and demolition, if necessary, of houses unfit for human habitation. In 1913 however the situation was as follows:

"There is a general scarcity of working class houses throughout Scotland. The chief reasons for that are the rising costs of building materials, the withdrawal of private capital from the field of enterprise and the reluctance of local authorities to exercise their powers to meet the demand".¹⁸

¹⁷ 1909 Housing, Town Planning etc. Act, 9 Edward 7 c. 44.

¹⁸ 1913 Nineteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, BPP Cd. 7327 1914, Vol XL.

Housing legislation was expected to tackle the problem in four ways; firstly, the clearance of slum areas; secondly, the improvement of defective houses; thirdly, the closure and demolition of uninhabitable houses; and fourthly, the provision of new houses. The Housing Act of 1909 gave local authorities the power to clear slums and initiate improvement schemes. However, the act had very little effect in Scotland as a whole, let alone in mining regions. In 1913, the Local Government Board described action in the two areas of slum clearance and improvement schemes as "disappointingly restricted".¹⁹ There was little doubt that many of the Burghal areas of Scotland needed improvement schemes, and yet since the 1909 act only one scheme had been submitted and approved by the Local Government Board. In 1913 another was under consideration and a third was receiving the attention of a local authority.

The cause of municipal inactivity was the obligation to rehouse occupants of demolished slums. With a scarcity of working class housing a local authority would have to embark upon a Housing Scheme prior to demolition of uninhabitable dwellings. The 1909 Act did, however, give local authorities power under Section 15 to improve defective houses either directly or indirectly through landlords. This was particularly useful when houses were scarce, since the situation would only be aggravated by closure. Nevertheless in 1913 only 15% of landward local authorities and 25.6% of burghal local authorities took advantage of their powers under the section.

As a result the situation in many extant and old houses remained unchanged. It has already been mentioned that difficulties arose regarding the interpretation of the 1909 Housing Act, largely, according to the Local

¹⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170. Local Government Board memorandum.

Government Board, because it was "new and unfamiliar".²⁰ The precise meanings of the term "back-to-back" and the word "dangerous" in the expression "dangerous and injurious to health" were in dispute in 1911.²¹ It was also obvious to Scottish local authorities that some of the stipulations pertaining to inhabitable dwellings could not be applied to Scottish housing. For example the demolition of a tenement in which only one dwelling was uninhabitable was impracticable. The exact interpretation of disputed points had to be decided by law; a process which served to prolong the Act's implementation.

By 1913, the peak year of coal production, one tenth of Scotland's population were miners and were housed partly in burghs and partly in landward areas. In the burghs some of the miners lived in houses similar to those occupied by other workers, but in other centres they lived apart in "miners' rows". These were at once recognisable as the same type as those found in mining villages in the jurisdiction of landward local authorities. In the report of the Royal Commission of 1917 the following was stated with regard to Fife;

"In mining districts the apparent distinction between burghal and landward communities is more than usually definite. The difference between the administrative powers of burghs and counties are not reflected in the external differences of the communities."²²

²⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911 on the subject of the housing of miners in Scotland, in connection with the deputation from the MFGB received by Lord Pentland.

²¹SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 7 11 1911.

²² Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the industrial Population of Scotland urban and Rural, 1917, Cd. 8731, Chapter XIV.

In relation to sanitation alone a sanitary visitor in Fifeshire would not be able to distinguish which were burghs and which were not.

In spite of the differences in "administrative control" between burghal and landward local authorities the Royal Commission of 1917 concluded that there were certain common features throughout. In all coalfields across Scotland there were well marked differences between the oldest and the newest houses, and between the worst and the best. There were also differences between coalfields; in the proportion of older houses, the prevalence of overcrowding and in sanitary facilities. Fifeshire and the Lothians, where the industry had developed and evolved over a long period showed great variety in housing standards. Mid-Lanark, on the other hand had a uniform house structure and village plan. The latter area was also highly congested, attributed according to the Commission to the rapid development of the mining industry in the mid nineteenth century.²³

The Scottish Local Government Board felt it the duty of the local authorities to exercise powers they already possessed under the public health acts to secure an improvement in the sanitary and habitable conditions of miners' houses. The Board was prepared to bring pressure to bear upon the local authorities, to the extent of taking legal action against them if they did not fulfil their obligations under the housing acts.²⁴

However, to be of any effect in bringing about improvements to miners' houses local authorities needed more powers, particularly in the areas of water supply, scavenging, the removal of household refuse and the

²³ Report of the 1917 Royal Commission, Cd. 8731, Chapter XIV.

²⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

provision and maintenance of roads. The absence of power to require owners to supply water to each house and to provide WCs was a serious defect of the Public Health Act of 1897. The Local Government Board for Scotland recommended that the powers regarding sanitation and water supply contained in sections 246, 254, 255 of the Burgh Police Act of 1892 and section 24 of the Burgh Police Act of 1903 be extended to cover county areas.²⁵

In relation to scavenging and the removal of domestic refuse, section 44 of the Local Government Act of 1894 provided for the formation of "special scavenging districts". Once such districts were formed the scavenging and cleansing provisions of the Police Acts could be put into force. The local authorities could not, however, form special scavenging districts unless they received a requisition to do so from the Parish Councils or the rate-payers. Although a formal requirement the said requisition was often difficult to obtain. The local authorities were only empowered to form "special water supply districts" on their own initiative.

Again, the problem of the condition of roads and footpaths in coal-mining villages concerned jurisdiction. In Scottish county areas a roads authority was responsible for highway condition, but, there was no authority responsible for conditions of streets or footpaths within mining villages.²⁶ The condition of these; miry in winter and dusty in summer, was a constant source of complaint from miners. In the Dunfermline district of Fife the roads in many instances were not properly bottomed or drained and as a result were covered in mud several inches deep in wet weather.

²⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170. LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

²⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

Mud was carried on the miners boots into their homes and it was impossible to keep houses clean when the roads were in such poor condition. Similar evidence was presented to the Royal Commission for Stirlingshire and Ayrshire.

If a mining village was located in a special scavenging district the local authority had the power under section 39 of the Public Health Act to have private streets and footpaths paved at the expense of the owners of adjoining properties. If, however, the village was outside a special scavenging district the local authority was powerless to act.²⁷ The local authorities sought the extension of their powers, not only to designate special scavenging districts upon their own initiative but, also to provide for 'special paving districts' within which the powers of the Burgh Police Acts regarding streets and pavements could be put into effect.

Another source of inefficiency lay in the constitution of the committees governing special scavenging districts. Under section 81(1) of the Local Government Act of 1889 it was ruled that committees should include residents of the special scavenging districts. However, in sections 44(8) and (9) of the Local Government Act of 1894, "Parish Councillors" were substituted for "residents". Difficulties arose where there were no parish councillors resident in or near the special district in question. The Local Government Board considered that the districts would be more efficiently managed if residents were eligible for appointment to the committees as originally intended.²⁸

²⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

²⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17..11..1911.

It was repeatedly suggested to the Royal Commission of 1917 that the restrictions by which special scavenging districts could only be formed on a requisition should be removed. Local authorities complained that it was often difficult to obtain such a requisition from a Parish Council or from the electors, as was necessary in the case of special water supply and special drainage districts. The Commission recommended that District Committees should be empowered to form all three districts on their own initiative.

3.5. The Local Government Board and miners' housing.

The principal problem of bringing about change and improvement in housing conditions lay in the differences in administration between urban and rural areas. It was generally accepted that improvements were necessary, but, the powers to introduce such improvements were not easily available to county authorities. It was equally felt by the Local Government Board that every house in a coal-mining community should have a scullery and a coal cellar and that each group of houses should have a washing house. These "conveniences" were regarded as the minimum required, and without them a house at the time could not be said to have been entirely "satisfactory".²⁹ Local authorities however had no statutory powers to make such provision compulsory.

The government was at pains not to antagonise private investors by demanding too much. In Scotland the Local Government Board, although aware of the problems of jurisdiction and responsibility, was unwilling to require the local authorities to do what might be considered "obviously unreasonable";

²⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

"It sometimes happens that in a locality where bad housing exists the mines are nearly exhausted and the mines will ere long be closed. In such cases it is unreasonable to call on the owner to carry out expensive improvements. If too much is insisted upon he will prefer to escape liability by evicting the miners and letting the houses fall to ruin".³⁰

Instead the Local Government Board dealt with the housing problem in a rather two edged manner. The Board was fully aware of all of the difficulties associated with improving conditions in coal-mining communities, especially those of inefficient local government. However, rather than demand changes in the law the Board suggested that members of mining communities were often responsible for poor living conditions and that they should work with local authorities to improve living standards. The Board was all the while aware that without sufficient powers such co-operation between local government and miners would be to little avail.

"It is notorious that in too many cases miners themselves cause or contribute to the nuisances that exist. The efforts of the local authorities would be more likely to meet with success if they had the support and co-operation of the general community. The miners should not hesitate to call the attention of the local authority or their officials to the nuisances or insanitary conditions at or near the houses. If no improvement is effected, they should carry their complaint to the Local Government Board".³¹

Reasonable though this suggestion may seem, in reality it was next to impossible to implement. In February 1893 for example, the Sanitary

³⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

³¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170 LGB, internal memorandum dated 17 11 1911.

Inspector of Dunfermline District reported that the west Fife villages of Milesmark and Parkneuk were in a "fearfully dirty state". In this instance the villagers had presented a petition to the county council calling for reforms. The lessees of the houses, Nimmo and Son of Rosebank Colliery, had also been called upon repeatedly by the District Committee to introduce an effective system of drainage. All of these efforts were to no avail despite action by both the inhabitants and the local authority.³²

In 1912 the Local Government Board for Scotland prepared a memorandum from local authorities on the provisions contained in the 1890 Housing of the Working Class Act and the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act. The point of the memorandum was to outline principles which were to be observed in the construction of houses for the working class, whether these were erected by local authorities, private individuals under grants, leases or contracts to which the local authorities were party. The memorandum was subject to all town planning requirements, local bye-laws and statutory provisions, concerning streets, open spaces and new buildings, except "in so far as they may be relaxed in accordance with the suggestions herein".³³

The Board had the power, under section 44 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc., Act of 1909, to revoke any bye-laws concerning new streets and new buildings that they considered an impediment to the erection of dwellings for the working classes. Its opinion and recommendations therefore could not be ignored. The recommendations contained in the memorandum however referred solely to municipal schemes. Private housing schemes

³² Article entitled "Sanitary Conditions in the West of Fife", *The Fifeshire Journal*, 9 February 1893, p. 6.

³³ SRO WRH DD6/653 21588/127 LGB memorandum dated 05 11 1912.

were the concern of the Office of Works, although the memorandum did apply to private schemes financed by the Local Government Board. Nevertheless it was expected that houses suitable to accommodate "persons of the better paid working class community" who could afford to pay a rent which would provide a "fair" return on capital investment would be provided by private enterprise. The efforts of the local authorities therefore were to be directed towards providing houses for those of the poorer classes who could only afford low rent. The Local Government Board defined members of the working class as;

"mechanics, artisans, labourers, and others working for wages; hawkers, costermongers, persons not working for wages, but, working at some trade or handicraft without employing others, except members of their own family, and persons other than domestic servants whose income in any case does not exceed an average of thirty shillings a week, and the family of any such persons who may be residing with them."³⁴

The types of houses deemed most suitable for such persons were cottages, whether semi-detached or in rows, or two storey houses, again either semi-detached or in rows, with separate dwellings on each floor.

The Board summarised its views on the more important principles relevant to the construction of single storey cottages or two-storey houses (either semi-detached or in rows) with separate dwellings on each floor. It was to be borne in mind by those concerned that the "reasonable needs of the working class or persons it is proposed to accommodate" were to be met and that "simplicity of design and economy in construction and general arrangement" should be aimed at. Builders were also to keep in mind that "houses erected by a local authority ought generally to be such as will be a

³⁴ SRO WRH DD6/653; definition found in the Schedule to the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1903.

model or standard for houses for the working classes which may be erected by private persons".³⁵

Ample space was to be afforded such dwellings and living rooms were to have the best possible aspect. If erected in rows workers houses were to be set back from the street line, to allow small gardens between the houses and the road, while it was recommended that the number in each row should not exceed eight or ten dwellings. By 1914 however, the Board had reduced this maximum to between six and eight houses per row.

Long continuous rows of houses were objected to not only because they overcrowded the site but also because they gave "a monotonous and depressing appearance" and prevented easy inter-communication between streets. It was advised that single storey cottages should have gardens placed back-to-back, without intervening streets, excepts in instances where there were no water closets or there was a daily removal of refuse. In areas where land was less costly single storey cottages could be built either singly or in pairs, to secure better light and ventilation, and with larger gardens than would normally be possible in an urban setting. In towns large gardens were usually provided only at higher rents, but it was assumed that tenants would secure a return in the form of garden produce. In the case of the two storey cottages, entrance from balconies was recommended, so long as this did not interfere with the proper lighting of rooms.³⁶

In relation to accommodation and interior arrangement it was presumed that internal arrangement would be influenced by the "custom of the

³⁵ SRO WRH DD6/653 21588/127 LGB memorandum of 1912.

³⁶ SRO WRH DD6/653, LGB memorandum dated 05 11 1912.

locality and by the habit of the population". Close attention was to be paid to the dimension of rooms, arrangement of doors, windows, fireplaces, etc. When cottages with more than three rooms were intended it was suggested that it would be more economical to place an extra room in the attic.³⁷

Houses for the poorer working classes were expected to contain at least a kitchen, a bedroom, a scullery, a large press for food, a water closet and a coal cellar. The kitchen was to be as large and as commodious as possible since it would be the living room for an entire family. It was to contain the large food press, a range and a boiler for hot water supply. The scullery was to have a washing boiler and a sink. Bedrooms were to be as large and airy as practicable with a fireplace in each. There was to be convenient space for bed, furniture and the free circulation of air. No bedroom was to be used as a passage room, but was to be entered from a hall or passage.

It was recommended that water closets be provided for each house, preferably with the entrance from inside the house. Where practicable water closet accommodation was also to be large enough to contain a bath. The coal cellar was to be located either inside or outside the house.

In the construction of these houses emphasis was placed upon economy of spending. Brickwork covered with harling or cement was recommended but a cheap wall could also be erected by using two four and a half inch bricks with a two and a half inch space between them, tied together at intervals with clamps. Outside walls were to be harled and interior walls plastered directly onto the bricks. Floors of kitchen and bedrooms were to be of wood, and not of cracked brick or beaten clay as was often the case, while sculleries and out buildings were to have concrete floors finished in

³⁷ SRO WRH DD6/653, LGB memorandum dated 05 11 1912.

cement. The cost of production in all these recommendations was to be kept down by standardisation for the whole scheme.³⁸

Local authority and private housing schemes alike had to be submitted to the Local Government Board for approval before construction could commence. Construction of houses for the working class did not go ahead unless they fulfilled the minima standards of the Board;

" at least two rooms in addition to a kitchen and scullery. Where the house is of the minimum standard the two rooms should both be bedrooms. No bed recesses . . . a sink and washing boiler and scullery, a W.C. with a bathroom where suitable. Where there is a large back garden or inadequate drainage facilities, an earth closet may be permitted, if sufficiently removed from the house, properly constructed and reserved for the use of one tenant. No subletting to be allowed. This should be embodied in an agreement between the Loan Commissioners and the Building Company . . . It is not practicable to specify the number of houses to be permitted in a continuous row. This largely depends upon the layout and surroundings of the houses . ."39

However the minima required were not essentially the same for municipal and private housing schemes. Local authorities were permitted to erect a smaller house in respect that "(1) they exercise reliable supervision over the occupancy and (2) in certain instances they have to house the very poorest." For these reasons the Local Government Board allowed the construction of one bedroom cottages in certain circumstances.

While the recommendations contained in the Local Government memorandum were laudable, it is clear that many loopholes existed and that the recommendations could be ignored. Local authorities could over-

³⁸ SRO WRH DD6/653 LGB, memorandum dated 05 11 1912.

³⁹ SRO WRH DD6/653/21588/27, LGB memorandum dated 05 11 1912.

ride regulations if they deemed it necessary. The Board's own emphasis upon "local custom" and savings on expenditure rendered large scale implementation of the guide-lines impracticable.

It should be remembered that most Scottish housing legislation concerned urban housing and areas under burghal jurisdiction. Housing in landward districts, including most coal company housing, was never specifically dealt with as it accounted for such a small proportion of the whole provision for the working class. Landward local authorities, although well aware of many of the housing problems in their own areas had little power to improve conditions.

In Scotland the Independent Labour Party founded in 1906 was closely allied to John Wheatley's campaign for good working class housing. This was particularly true of Glasgow where the labour movement supported agitation for rent restrictions in 1914. The type of house aimed at by housing reformers resembled the English style three bedroom single storey cottage with garden, and was strongly influenced by Ebenezer Howard's ideas for Garden City suburbs, first published in 1898.⁴⁰ The Tudor Walters Report on Housing published in 1918 in the aftermath of the Royal Commission emphasised Garden City ideals for the design and layout of housing schemes. The erection of single or double cottages with a garden was recommended as was particular interior division of functions; the separation of eating, sleeping and living quarters. The suggested maximum density was twelve houses per acre. All flatted dwellings erected had to be entered from the ground floor. The common close or stairwell was frowned upon as it was believed to be conducive to squalor and ill health.

⁴⁰ Smout, T.C., (1986) *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, Collins, London, 39.

Recommendations on internal layout were reflected in house furnishings, the removal of the bed recess from the kitchen and the replacement of the open multi-purpose range by a gas oven. Such ideas influenced not only municipal and local government schemes, such as the admiralty housing scheme for the naval workers at Rosyth dockyard,⁴¹ but also the layout of private housing schemes such as the Wemyss Coal Company development at Coaltown of Wemyss and the Fife Coal Company village of High Valleyfield.

Such high standards and the combination of the best aspects of rural and urban living with circulation of clean air and access to open spaces, were reflected in post war housing design and greatly influenced the Local Government Board in its 1912 suggestions, outlined above, directed at private builders and local authorities. They also influenced the Royal Commission on Housing in 1917 and the Housing Act of 1919.

The efforts of the Miners Federation from 1892 onwards and the Royal Commission of 1917 brought the plight of coal miners to national attention. Between 1892 and 1912 the Union repeatedly agitated for a special enquiry into conditions in Scottish mining villages. Details of the deputations of miners and their meetings with the Secretary of State for Scotland to discuss conditions in mining communities are given in Chapter 8. Pressure from the union culminated in the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1912 (see Chapter 9). The Commission's report, published in 1917, and agitation on rents and war time profiteering focused public opinion on the housing

⁴¹ Gleave, S., (1988) *The influence of the Garden City Movement in Fife 1914-23*, with particular reference to Rosyth. M. Phil. Thesis, University of St. Andrews.

of the working class. The 1919 Housing Act committed central funds to subsidising local authority housing schemes and created the Ministry of Health.

3.6. Post World War I housing legislation and miners' housing.

The 1919 Housing Act was strongly influenced by pressure from the working class during the war years. Indeed the primary force behind the Act's enactment was working class unrest and general social instability. Nevertheless, according to Melling it cannot be taken as a "watershed" of State intervention.⁴² While undoubtedly the first Act to deal effectively with housing provision for the working class, it was nonetheless the result of a gradual process of State intervention from the 1860s onwards. Despite the gradual evolution in housing and welfare policies, legislation in housing prior to 1919, even the Acts of 1890 and 1909 had little effect in Scotland. As stated earlier local authorities were either reluctant or unable to use their statutory powers until the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 extended their obligation to inspect housing. According to Orbach,

"left to their own devices local authorities would do as little as possible. . . . although the various pieces of legislation concerning housing were consolidated and even broadened in the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, they remained largely ignored and successive governments appeared disinclined to initiate effective new approaches."⁴³

⁴² Melling, J., (1980) *Housing Social Policy and the State*. Croom Helm, London p. 41.

⁴³ Orbach, L.F., *Op. cit.* p. 39.

It can equally be asserted that if the social unrest of the war years had not intervened, it is unlikely that such dramatic legislation as the 1919 Act would have resulted from the gradual evolution in social welfare policy.

With the Housing Act of 1919, the government conceded the principle of State subsidy for local authority housing. The Act's origins lay in the report of the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, working class unrest over housing during the war years and in Lloyd George's awareness of the need for "insurance against revolution" as exemplified in his "homes fit for heroes to live in" post-war election campaign of 1918.⁴⁴ The Russian Revolution in 1917 and fear of the spread of Bolshevism concentrated the Government's mind on controlling social disturbances at home. One means of appeasing a dissatisfied workforce was to dispense largesse through the provision of better standards of living accommodation. As Lloyd George stated in a cabinet meeting following the George Square riots in 1919; "Even if it cost a hundred million pounds, what was that compared to the stability of the State".⁴⁵

Working Class dwellings erected following the 1919 Housing Act were of a very high standard. Accommodation was architect designed and spacious; brick built or erected with the use of concrete blocks; all had bathrooms and running water. There one drawback was that they were expensive. High inflation following the First World War had led to an escalation of building costs. Demobbing of soldiers took two years causing a crisis in the supply of skilled labour. Cheaper methods of construction were inevitably resorted to.

⁴⁴ Smout, T.C., *Op. cit.* p. 52 and "Lloyd George, The Great Campaign" in *The Times*, 05 11 1918.

⁴⁵ Swenerton, M., (1981) *Homes Fit for Heroes, The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*, Heinemann, London, p. 78.

The 1919 Housing Act laid the foundation for effective government intervention and control of housing provision and regulation and was followed by six other acts between 1923 and 1938. Each of these effectively whittled away at the major concessions and commitment to State support of housing provision for the working classes made in the original act. Most of the housing acts of the 1920s were concerned with housing management; consolidating the power of local authorities, in view of their responsibility for provision, allocation and administration of working class properties. Several of these were also attempts to reduce costs of working class housing provision for the state. The principle act of 1919 was followed in the same year by a Housing (Additional Powers) Act which provided a treasury subsidy to private building wishing to erect housing for the working class.⁴⁶ Even in the first year of enactment of the principle act the government recognised that it was futile to expect the exchequer to fund the entire housing programme. One solution was to encourage private enterprise to once again play a prominent role in house building by aiding their recovery from war time set-backs through the provision of central treasury subsidies. This was effectively the beginning of a cost cutting exercise by the State and the attempts to return to their pre-war position of non-intervention.

The 1920 Housing (Scotland) Act gave local authorities power to compulsory purchase land needed for working class housing.⁴⁷ This provided local government with access to quality sites without high costs associated with market competition. The 1921 Housing Act, again concerning Scotland alone, limited exchequer commitment, in the form of grants legislated for in

⁴⁶ 10 & 11 Geo. 5. c. 99.

⁴⁷ 10 & 11 Geo. 5. c. 71.

the 1919 Act, to £1.65 million.⁴⁸ Chamberlain's 1923 Housing Act provided for the payment of a lump sum to private builders by local councils, again as an incentive to private enterprise and a means of reducing central funding of local authority schemes.⁴⁹ Local government housing schemes were only undertaken if the Scottish Board of Health regarded them as "more appropriate" than private enterprise schemes. Despite generous incentives this act failed to generate private enterprise commitment to the erection of working class housing. The 1924 Housing (Financial Provision) Act introduced by Wheatley under the Labour government, removed from local authorities the burden of proof concerning the superiority of their schemes over private sector plans.⁵⁰ This act aimed to encourage and support both private and public housing schemes by extending and increasing the subsidy for house building. The 1925 Housing Scotland Act consolidated the position of local authorities and granted them a greater degree of independence by permitting local government to fix local rents independently of central government.⁵¹

The importance of all these acts to the story of miners housing is that in the aftermath of the Housing Act of 1919 Scottish coal companies had at their disposal government subsidies in the form of local authority grants to aid building programmes. Coal companies were treated as private enterprise and received the same commitment from the State as speculative builders.

⁴⁸ 11 & 12 Geo . 5. c. 33.

⁴⁹ 13 & 14 Geo. 5 c. 24.

⁵⁰ 14 & 15 Geo. 5 c. 35.

⁵¹ 15 & 16 Geo. 5 c. 20.

Even after 1919 the government displayed great reluctance to take control of housing for employees in specific industries. The post war position on housing for miners was that the government was prepared as an emergency provision to make grants available to local authorities undertaking approved housing schemes. Local authorities had to contribute only 1d. per pound on the rates. However as far as the government was concerned it was not the business of local authorities to provide houses for particular industries. In the case of coal-mining it was feared that provision of houses for miners would effectively act as a subsidy to the industry. It was nonetheless incumbent upon local authorities to provide houses for the working class following the 1919 Act.

"There should be no special class of workers who are to be subjected to different conditions of housing from others. Proper housing is a human requisite of general application no matter where the person may be located. It is not right, therefore, to seek to deal with special classes of the community, and by means of the particular nature of their vocation to deny them the privileges which are enjoyed by other classes".⁵²

Scottish local authorities were therefore in a difficult and awkward position. Until 1919 it was national housing policy to leave the supply of housing for the working class to private enterprise, subject to building regulation under the 1890 and 1909 housing acts. Because of the special circumstances of the coal-mining industry however private enterprise was reluctant to remain involved in housing provision after 1919 (see Chapters 8-10). In any event private investment focused upon new buildings with the prospect of an economic return in rent and not on the renovation and improvement of old stock.

⁵² SRO WRH DD6/1171 Letter of June 1919 from W.E. Whyte, Clerk to the District Committee of the Middle Ward in Lanarkshire, to the LGB, Edinburgh.

Although coal owners were averse to making such "radical" improvements to their workers houses as the introduction of proper sewage and water systems in view of their "temporary interest" in the workings, it was acknowledged that some coal-owners attempted to improve their houses in the years leading up to the war. All such efforts ceased during the war. Where improvements were made by coal-owners rents were naturally increased. Miners were accustomed to paying low rent. But apart from the tradition of paying little rent, their houses were often so old, of such poor standard and so isolated that they did not warrant high rent. It was therefore not surprising that miners paid between £6 and £12 per annum for company homes (see Chapters 8 and 10 for details on rent).

It was repeatedly asserted that many of these houses were in an unsatisfactory state. The principle causes were; (1) that many miners houses were not intended to be, or regarded as, permanent fixtures. They were either erected with a short life expectancy or they had been in use for so long (often eighty to a hundred years after they were built) that they were not expected to last much longer; (2) that the life expectancy and profitable working of the mines led to the coal owners "indisposition" to improve workers houses; (3) that the local authorities were unable to enforce "remedial" public health improvements because of difficulty in proving that conditions were a "nuisance" and the prohibitive cost of introducing water and drainage services; (4) and lastly, that local authorities were greatly handicapped in their efforts to improve the situation by the absence of appropriate statutory powers.

Even in the aftermath of the Royal Commission of 1917 there was a general assumption that coal miners houses would continue to be financed at least

in part, by coal-owners. In a letter to the Local Government Board in 1918 the Clerk to the District Committee of the Middle Ward in Lanarkshire, W.E. Whyte, proposed that while local authorities should be responsible for building and providing miners houses as near as possible to centres of population, coal employers should contribute to the capital costs of building projects and make arrangement for the transport of the colliers to their work.⁵³

Whyte suggested that the State, local authorities and coal-owners should each pay one third towards the capital costs of improvement schemes in mining areas. But, he recognised that;

"One of the chief difficulties effecting the sanitary improvements most required is due to the fact that adequate means of drainage and sewage disposal cannot be provided on account of the small valuation of the mining village and the very costly schemes of sewage purification which are now demanded."⁵⁴

Efforts to effect improvement to sanitary conditions were then hampered by two problems; firstly, as a result of the location of many miners houses, in communities close to the colliery, expensive schemes would have to be introduced to improve their sanitation and secondly, such houses were often of insufficient rateable valuation to warrant the introduction of expensive sanitation schemes by the local authorities. Local government was as concerned about investment in housing and adequate return as the

⁵³ SRO WRH DD6/1171 Letter of June 1919 from W.E. Whyte, Clerk to the District Committee of the Middle Ward in Lanarkshire, to the LGB, Edinburgh.

⁵⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1171/7255/30 Letter of June 1919 from W.E. Whyte, Clerk to the District Committee of the Middle Ward in Lanarkshire, to the LGB, Edinburgh.

coal owners. Local authorities had to concern themselves with overall benefit to the majority of rate-payers under their jurisdiction.

The wheel had turned full circle. In 1919 local authorities were as reluctant to invest in miners' housing as coal companies, despite the government's commitment to the working class in the 1919 Housing Act. One solution was for local government to erect new houses in accessible and high valuation areas, which indeed they did. For these however miners were in competition with other workers. If houses were to be erected specifically for miners coal companies had to be involved. Throughout the 1920s the government attempted to persuade coal companies and others to do just this by offering incentives in the form of housing subsidies. These were to a certain extent successful, but the scale of housing erected was never equal to requirements.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the problems associated with housing in coal-mining communities. These are (1) the legacy of Scottish local government; (2) lack of local authority jurisdiction and their unwillingness to take full responsibility for mining districts; (3) reluctance on the government's part to take responsibility for providing adequate housing for miners; and (4) coal-owners' unwillingness to improve their housing stock and conditions in mining communities. The government's approach to dealing with the problem of housing conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities was to encourage coal-owners to retain full responsibility and increase investment in housing.

The advantage was therefore entirely on the side of Scottish coal-owners. Their "reasonable" right to property and its use, their right to maintain profit in a free capitalist market and not to have "unreasonable" demands made upon them, were always to be upheld. That it was equally unreasonable to expect people to live in bad housing was upheld only when it did not interfere with the rights of private enterprise. The government approach was one of persuasion rather than coercion. It wished and would have preferred the coal companies themselves to take the initiative and improve conditions and provide more and better quality housing. In the years leading up to the First World War it became clear that coal-owners while not refusing outright were increasingly reluctant to increase investment in workers housing (see Chapters 7, 8 and 10). While coal companies continued to provide housing for their workers during the War and after, and while these houses were often of high standard and acceded to government regulation, they were never erected on the scale needed to accommodate all of the colliers and their families requiring homes.

The net result of pre- and post-First World War housing legislation was that local authorities either provided housing schemes in mining districts or they authorised coal companies to do so with the aid of exchequer subsidy, but took full responsibility for sewage, water supply and scavenging. In the inter-war years it was abundantly clear that coal companies were willing to erect good quality new houses, and indeed were often eager to do so in view of the findings of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry in 1919, but were reluctant to provide the infrastructure to support such housing or to improve older stock (see Chapter 10).

The concerns and obligations of coal-owners with regard to the provision and upkeep of miners' housing are dealt with in the next Chapter.

Responsibility for the condition and upkeep of coal company housing lay with them only for the duration of the mineral lease. The next chapter explains how houses for miners were provided under mineral leases and demonstrates how housing legislation affected leases and encouraged coal companies in their increasing reluctance to house their workers.

Table 3.1. Housing Health and Sanitation Legislation (Scotland) 1855-1919.

1855 Dwelling Houses (Scotland) Act	(18 & 19 Vict. c. 88)
1856 Nuisances Removal (Scotland) Act	(19 & 20 Vict. c. 103)
1862 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act	(25 & 26 Vict. c. 101)
1866 Labouring Classes Dwelling Houses Act	(29 & 30 Vict. c. 28)
1867 Public Health (Scotland) Act	(30 & 31 Vict. c. 101)
1868 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862 Amendment Act	(31 & 32 Vict. c. 102)
1868 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act (Torrens)	(31 & 32 Vict. c. 130)
1871 Public Health (Scotland) Amendment Act	(34 & 35 Vict. c. 38)
1875 Public Health (Scotland) Amendment Act	(38 & 39 Vict. c. 74)
1875 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement (Scotland)Act	(38 & 39 Vict. c. 49)
1877 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862 Amendment Act	(40 & 41 Vict. c. 22)
1878 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862 Amendment Act	(41 & 42 Vict. c. 30)
1879 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings (1868) Amendment Act	(42 & 43 Vict. c. 64)
1880 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement (Scotland) Act	(43 Vict. c. 2)
1880 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act (1868) Amendment Act (1879) Amendment	(43 Vict. c. 8)
1881 Removal Terms (Burghs) (Scotland) Act	(44 & 45 Vict. c. 39)
1882 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862 Amendment Act	(45 & 46 Vict. c. 6)
1882 Artisans Dwellings Act	(45 & 46 Vict. c. 54)

1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act	(48 & 49 Vict. c. 72)
1886 Removal Terms Amendment (Scotland) Act	(49 & 50 Vict. c. 50)
1889 General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862 Amendment Act	(52 & 53 Vict. c. 51)
1889 Local Government Act	(52 & 53 Vict. c. 50)
1890 Removal Terms (Scotland) Act 1886 Amendment Act	(53 & 54 Vict. c. 36)
1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act	(53 & 54 Vict. c. 70)
1892 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act	(55 & 56 Vict. c. 55)
1894 Local Government Act	(57 & 58 Vict. c. 58)
1897 Public Health Act	(60 7 61 Vict. c. 38)
1903 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act	(3 Edw. 7 c. 33)
1909 Housing and Town Planning etc. Act	(9 Edw. 7 c. 44)
1911 House Letting and Rating (Scotland) Act	(1 & 2 Geo. 5. c. 53)
1914 Housing Act	(4 & 5 Geo. 5 c.31)
1914 Housing No. 2. Act	(4 &5 Geo. 5 c.52)
1915 Housing (Rosyth Dockyard) Act	(5 & 6 Geo. 5. c 49)
1915 Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act	(5 & 6 Geo. 5. c. 97)
1919 Housing Town Planning etc. (Scotland) Act	(9 & 10 Geo. 5. c. 60)
1919 Housing (Additional Powers) Act	(9 & 10 Geo. 5. c. 99)

Table 3.2. Legislation Pertaining to Scottish Housing 1890-1930

1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act	(53 & 54 Vict. c. 70.)
Consolidated earlier demolition or slum clearance powers and enabled local authorities to build new houses.	
1892 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act	(55 & 56 Vict. c.55.)
Building regulations for all towns; extended to county councils in 1897.	
1893 Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893	(55 & 56 Vict.c.39.)
Government loans to limited dividend housing societies.	
1899 Small Dwellings Acquisition Act	(62 & 63 Vict. c.44.)
Local authorities permitted to lend money to assist housing purchase. (A "dead letter" in Scotland)	
1903 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act	(3 Edw. 7 c.33.)
Municipalities to compile a register of streets to regulate activities and uses.	
1909 Housing Town Planning etc. Act	(9 Edw. 7 c.44.)
Urban local authorities permitted to extend boundaries for housing purposes and the drawing up of town planning schemes. Third Schedule and sections 52 and 53 applied to Scotland.	
1911 House Letting and Rating (Scotland) Act	(1 & 2 Geo. 5. c. 53)
Strengthened landlords powers of eviction. Collection of local rates by landlords and introduction of short house letting periods.	
1915 Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act	(5 & 6 Geo. 5. c.97.)
Rent fixed at 1914 levels for the duration of the war plus a further six months for properties with a specific valuation. Mortgage recall and increase in interest disallowed.	
1919 Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act (known as Addison Act)	(9 & 10 Geo. 5. c.60.)
Local authorities to conduct surveys of housing needs and to submit plans of housing schemes to the Scottish Office at Whitehall. Cost of house-building limited to 8d. on the rates with the treasury covering further costs.	

1919 Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act (9 & 10 Geo. 5. c.67.)
Renewal and extension of rent controls. Limited rent increases allowed.

1919 Housing (Additional Powers) Act (10 & 11 Geo. 5. c.99.)
Treasury subsidy available to private builders.

1920 Housing (Scotland) Act 1920 (10 & 11 Geo. 5. c.71.)
Councils permitted to take up compulsorily private properties for working class housing.

1921 Housing (Scotland) Act 1921 (11 & 12 Geo. 5. c.33.)
Exchequer grants provided under 1919 Housing etc. Act limited to £1.65 million.

1923 Housing etc. Act (known as Chamberlain Act) (13 & 14 Geo. 5. c.24.)
Payment of lump sum to builders by councils. Councils compensated by £6 per house fixed payment from the treasury for 20 years. Council house building schemes undertaken only if approved by Scottish Board of Health as "more appropriate" than private schemes. 50% subsidy available for rehousing due to slum clearance. (failed to generate private sector interest in working class housing).

1924 Housing (Financial Provision) Act 1924 (known as Wheatley Act; a reaction to the 1923 act) (14 & 15 Geo. 5. c.35.)
Extension of eligibility for subsidy; increase to £9. Removal of the necessity for councils to prove inadequacy and unsuitability of private enterprise housing schemes.

1925 Housing (Scotland) Act. (15 & 16 Geo. 5. c.20.)
Local authorities granted power to fix rents independently (although guidelines given)

1926 Housing (Rural Workers) Act (16 & 17 Geo. 5. c.56.)
Grants and loans from local authorities to workers to reconstruct houses for agricultural workers. Treasury committed to pay half of maximum grant of £100.

1929 Housing (Revision of Contributions) Act (20&21 Geo. 5. c.40.)
Revision of 1923 subsidies following reduction in building costs.

1930 Housing (Scotland) Act. (20&21 Geo. 5. c.40.)
Slum clearance programme. Grant per person rehoused; £2.50 made available to local authorities for 40 years for each person rehoused; replaced subsidy under 1923 act for replacement of slum properties.

After Rodger R., (ed.) (1989) *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* pps. 238-240 and Acts of Parliament cited.

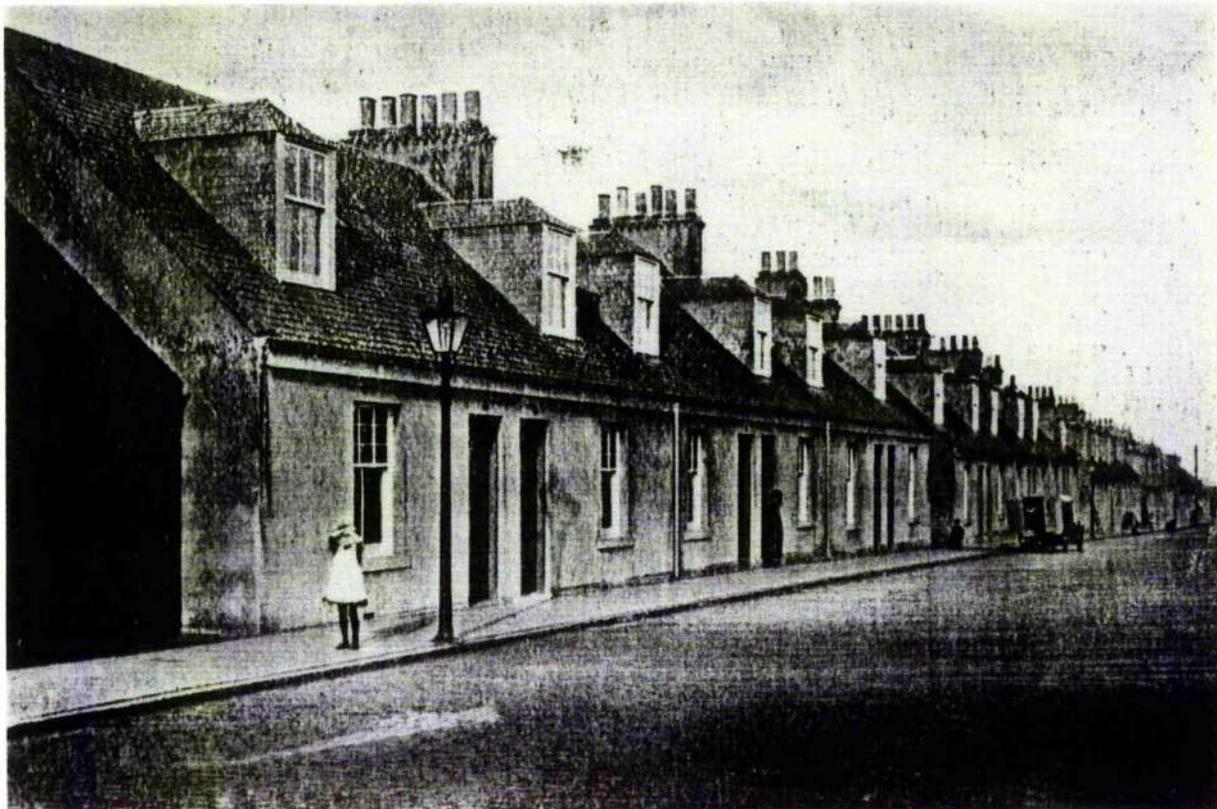


Plate 5 Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company houses at Auchterderran Road, Lochgelly. 49, 2 and 3 room houses with scullery and W.C., built in 1900.



Plate 6 Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company houses at Cardenden. 8, 3 and 4 room houses with scullery and bathroom, built in 1925.

Chapter 4

Mineral leases and coal company housing

4. 1. Introduction

In the report of the Royal Commission on housing in Scotland, published in 1917, mineral leases were described as one of the primary causes of poor housing and living conditions in Scottish mining villages. Housing for miners was provided as part of an overall mining operation. Its provision cannot be considered without reference to the legal arrangements attached to mining and the leasing of minerals. The conditions laid down in mineral leases which governed housing provision for miners are indications of the attitude of parties to the lease towards housing.

The purpose of the chapter is to provide the necessary background for the later consideration of (a) the condition of miners' housing in Fife mining communities and (b) the attitude of Fife coal companies to workers' housing in the first third of the twentieth century. The chapter is divided into sections which deal with land tenure and housing in Scotland, and mineral leases and legal arrangements for the provision of housing by coal companies. It will be shown that, as with local government legislation, legal arrangements between coal companies and land proprietors were often confused, unclear and under dispute, and that concern for workers' houses was generally a matter of political expediency. The chapter will illustrate the concerns of coal companies vis a vis workers' housing; in particular their pre-occupation with "acceptable" valuations of the properties.

4. 2. *Land tenure and Scottish housing.*

Legal arrangements governing the provision of coal company housing were derived from the regulations governing the mineral leases. These in turn were determined by the system of land tenure. Scottish tenure of land and property was based upon a feudal relationship between superior and vassal. The superior or landlord granted the property to the vassal according to a feu which was a perpetual lease on the land itself. The superior, the owner or proprietor of the land, granted the property to the vassal in return for a fixed annual feu-duty. The superior effectively granted the vassal the use of the land or the site. The vassal in return was bound to an annual payment often supplemented by special payments at stated intervals.¹ The vassal could subfeu the land in return for payment of an increased feu duty. This sub-feuing transaction had nothing to do with the proprietor of the property. Once the superior and vassal agreed a feu on a property the former relinquished all title to the land in return for the annual duty in perpetuity. In return for the loss of interest in the property the land superior was relieved of the burden of paying rates while retaining a fixed annual income from his land.

"The granter of a normal lease is the proprietor or landlord. A tenant may by granting a sublease become a lessor with the rights and duties of a landlord in relation to the subtenant; again the subtenant may grant a sublease in favour of another party and so on. The granter of the sublease derives his right to do so ultimately from the proprietor."²

The obligation to pay feu duty was passed down to each individual feuer and subfeuer. Feuing and subfeuing gave each participant the right and

¹ Saunders, L. J., (1950) *Scottish Democracy 1815-1840*. Oliver and Boyd, London, p. 164.

² Paton, G.C.H., and Cameron, J.G.S., (1967) *The Law of Landlord and Tenant in Scotland*. The Scottish Universities Law Institute, Aberdeen, p. 43.

opportunity to speculate in property values. Since the vassal could take out a subfeu and the subfeuee could do the same, it was in the interest of the superior to gain as high an initial feu duty as possible, as the amount of the superior's feu duty remained the same no matter how much the property increased in value. The feuer could erect buildings on the land, within the terms of the contract, and either let or sell these to private investors or owner occupiers.

Feus were expensive and vassals often subfeued to builders, or themselves erected as many houses as possible to extract a high return for their investment. Speculative builders sold their properties to either individual owner occupiers or to private investors who became Landlords and in turn let the properties to tenants. The land user, the occupier of the property, or the tenants of houses bore the brunt of the weight of the whole feuing system, as they were at the end of a chain of parties to the contract.

This system of land tenure encouraged intensive building, especially if the initial feu duty was high and if the increase in the value of the property was not guaranteed. In either of these instances the only way to ensure a return for investment was to build as many houses as possible on the site. This was achieved by erecting multi-storey tenements instead of single storey terraced cottages. There were no restrictions on the subdivision of property. The landlord could have as many tenants as he liked, each paying rent and a contribution to rates. Furthermore the return per individual tenant might be small but the total return was often large.³ The cost of the feu duty often led to high levels of rent which would further encourage subdivision of properties and overcrowding. Very little attention was paid to the quality of the properties or to the living standards of the occupiers.

³ Saunders, L. J., *Op. cit.* p. 160.

This system of tenure was akin to the European method and completely different to the short lease or freehold prevalent in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The rights of the vassal in Scotland were based upon tenure of the property whereas those of an English tenant were based upon mutual contract.⁴ In English contractual leases the primary rights to the property remained with the landowner and all land and buildings upon it reverted to the landed proprietor when the lease expired. The tenant had only temporary rights under the lease. The Scottish feu duty on the other hand was an annual payment in perpetuity. If the land was feued for building purposes the builder retained rights to the buildings he had erected when the feu expired. There was no "reversion of interest" to the ground landlord as was the case with the English short lease. The Scottish vassal was the sole owner of the properties he erected.⁵

4.3. Mineral leases and colliery housing.

Colliery housing was not erected under the feuing norm. Instead the erection of coal company housing was controlled by mineral leases which combined elements of both the feu charter and mutual contract. It was common practice well into the twentieth century for houses associated with mineral leases to be leased along with the mine. However variations were introduced when some proprietors attempted to feu their houses to coal companies, rather than lease them along with the mineral, as feus increased their revenue.

⁴ Paton, G.C.H. and Cameron, J.G.S., *Op. cit.* p. 8.

⁵ Daunton, M. J., (1983) *House and Home in the Victorian City. Working-Class Housing 1850-1914.* Edward Arnold, London, p. 69.

Mineral leases were called "tacks" in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the tenant was the "tacksman". Early mineral leases were of short duration usually varying from two to nine years. "Tacks" generally included some provision for housing as part of the rent of surface and mineral property. Housing provision was on a small scale however and reflected the short term nature of the coal mining operations. Original examples of "tacks" survive at the Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh and contain details of the provision of houses for miners, as can be seen from the following examples.

In a proposal for a tack at Houston colliery Linlithgow in 1796, the terms of the agreement included the building by the proprietor of the land (not the coal operator) of as many colliers' houses as were needed and the tacksman (tenant/coal operator) was to pay seven and a half per cent for the money spent by the proprietor on these houses.⁶ A further tack at Houston in 1803 gave the tacksman (i.e. the lessee) the right "to build houses for the accommodation of himself, servant and others to be employed by him in carrying out the said operation".⁷ By 1805 there were ten colliers' houses attached to the colliery and the tack of that year "bound and obliged" the tacksman to put the colliers' houses in good tenantable condition and to expend £100 sterling in erecting additional houses to accommodate the workers. The tenant was solely responsible for all expenses incurred in erecting necessary houses.⁸ A later tack of 1826 stated that houses associated with the lease were to be left in good condition at the end of the lease.⁹

⁶ SRO GRH GD 30/695 : Proposal for tack of Houston Colliery, Linlithgow, 1796.

⁷ SRO GRH GD 30/698 : Details of tack, Houston Colliery, 1803.

⁸ SRO GRH GD/30/699: Tack of coal, 29 May 1805, Houston Colliery.

The example given above contains all the basic elements of leasing contracts that were to survive in mineral leases into the twentieth century. Legal arrangements within the leasing contracts can be divided into two types; the first provided for the erection of housing by the landed proprietor, the owner of the land and minerals and the second provided for the erection of houses by the coal operator, the lessee of the land and minerals. If, as in the first type, houses were built by the proprietor prior to the lessee leasing the minerals, they were usually leased to the mineral tenant with the minerals. They then reverted to the landowner upon termination of the lease. To this end it was usually specifically stated that they were to be kept and left in good habitable condition. If, on the other hand, there were no houses at the site the mineral tenant was given the right to erect whatever was needed to accommodate his workers. Upon the expiry of the mineral lease these were either taken over by the proprietor at a cost or disposed of by the tenant. Again it was stipulated in leases that such houses were to be maintained in habitable condition.

Until 1942, when the Coal Act of 1938 came into effect, the owner of surface land also owned all minerals underneath.¹⁰ A coal mine therefore belonged to the owner of the ground from whom it could be held separately. A mineral lease however, was in effect a sale of the minerals to the lessee, as once the minerals were extracted they could not be replaced or recovered. This is the basic difference between a mineral lease and the lease of land or real property. In law, however, mineral leases were treated as though they

⁹ SRO GRH GD/30/706 : Repair of colliers houses, Houston Colliery, 1826.

¹⁰ 1 & 2 Geo. 6 c. 52.

were temporary lets of property and not as outright sales.¹¹ The minerals were in effect sold to the mining operator in return for what was termed "gradual delivery" rather than a fixed rent. This return depended upon the quality and quantity of the mineral extracted. The rate of return, (the gradual delivery) called the lordship or royalty, was a proportion of the minerals taken. Royalties were generally paid on the tonnage raised, often 6d. to 9d. per ton, while in some areas the royalty was linked to the selling price per ton; either one seventh or one twelfth.¹²

Under the mineral lease the minerals alone and not the surface land were usually let to the coal operator. The surface meanwhile could be leased to an agricultural tenant. If the surface property was leased to the mineral tenant for a purpose necessary for the extraction or treatment of the mineral there was a provision for a normal rent of the surface land in addition to the royalty payable on the minerals. The terms of mining leases usually also involved the payment of a minimum "certain rent", whether coal was worked or not. Certain rent was generally tied to the "expected" tonnage yield, and could be from £1 to £5 per annum, per statute acre of the whole area under lease. For example, in a mineral lease of 1912 between the Wilson and Clyde Coal Company Ltd. and the proprietors of Bandrum Estate Fife, the terms of settlement were as follows: a royalty of 4d. was to be paid on every twenty two and a half hundredweight raised and a proportionate lordship on twenty hundredweight; the fixed rent was set at

¹¹ Paton, G.C.H, and Cameron, J.G.S., *Op. cit.* p. 8.

¹² Anderson, D., (1982) *Coal; A Pictorial History of the British Coal Industry.* p. 12.

£150 per annum commencing at Whitsunday 1913 and there were to be "breaks" every two years to permit revision of the terms of the lease.¹³

By the mid nineteenth century mineral leases were normally of long duration with breaks at definite and regular intervals to allow for renegotiation. Leases could be revised or terminated if the minerals ran out or proved difficult to extract. The duration of "long leases" varied depending on the subject of the lease. For the purposes of the Land Valuation (Scotland) Act of 1854 a long lease was 21 or 31 years for minerals;¹⁴ for the Registration of Leases (Scotland) Act of 1857 it was 31 years¹⁵ and for the Long Leases (Scotland) Act of 1954 it was 50 years.¹⁶ Long leases of land, particularly land intended for building purposes were often granted in Scotland as alternative to feus. Tenants of long leases in effect became the proprietors of the property while the landlords were in a position similar to that of feu superiors. According to the Lands Valuation (Scotland) Act 1854, a tenant with a lease of over 21 years, or 31 years in the case of a mineral lease, became the proprietor of the property and appeared thus in the valuation roll.

Mineral leases were not only granted to individuals, but also to companies incorporated under the Companies Acts.¹⁷ In such cases however, the

¹³ SRO GRH GD 1/42/2/39 : Paper relating to minerals in Bandrum Estate Fife, 1912-1920.

¹⁴ 17 & 18 Vict. c. 91.

¹⁵ 20 & 21 Vict. c. 26.

¹⁶ 2 & 3 Eliz. 2 c. 49.

¹⁷ 1862 Companies Act, 25 & 26 Vict. c. 89; 1890 Companies Act, 53 & 54 Vict. c. 62.

memoranda of association stipulated that upon a company going into liquidation, the lease could be terminated by the landlord. Mineral leases could also be joint ventures where both the owner and operator shared the profits of the undertaking. In this case the proprietor had the option of taking a share in the profit instead of a stated rent or royalty.

As the nineteenth century progressed regulations concerning the provision of housing became more complicated. Coal companies were generally empowered to build whatever they needed to carry out the coal extraction, so long as the landed proprietor received a return in the form of ground rent and royalties. Under the articles of association of the Bowhill Coal Company founded in 1894 to work the coalfield at Auchterderran Parish Fife, the company was entitled to;

". purchase, take or lease or in exchange hire, construct, erect, make or otherwise acquire, alter and maintain all buildings, houses, plant, machinery . . . requisite for carrying on the said business . . ." ¹⁸

By 1900 eighty new houses had been built under the company's mineral lease, fifty four of which were occupied.

Stipulations similar to these were found in most mining contracts of the period. Upon expiry of such leases disputes sometimes arose concerning responsibility for plant, machinery and housing. If the minerals were extracted, the land left was either taken over by another tenant or returned to the proprietor. But what became of the machinery plant and housing remaining on the surface in such circumstances, and who exactly was responsible for the maintenance and condition of the housing stock and for

¹⁸ SRO GRH GD/571/4 : Bundle of miscellaneous relating to the Bowhill Coal Company Fife, 1894 -1909, including the 1894 prospectus.

their occupants? From the evidence presented below it will become clear that when negotiating leases, both parties made every effort to avoid responsibility for housing stock and living conditions.

When a mineral lease, authorising the mineral tenant to erect all buildings necessary for the carrying out of the business, was being negotiated, it was general practice for the mineral tenant to insert a clause allowing him to remove his buildings at the end of the lease, unless the landlord took over the properties at valuation.¹⁹ Therefore at the end of the lease the proprietor of the land could if he wished take over the ownership of houses erected by the mineral tenants by paying their then value, less their value when either first erected or when the lease was taken out. In order to protect the owner of the land it was generally stated in leases that the coal companies were bound to maintain the housing in good habitable condition so that the proprietor could relet or feu them without difficulty.

Difficulties arose with this arrangement if the landlord did not wish to take over the properties, leaving the coal company responsible for either the sale or demolition of the properties. If, on the other hand, the houses were already owned by the landed proprietor when the lease was first taken out they were generally let to the company on condition that the company "maintained and returned them in good tenantable condition".

While straightforward in theory, in practice legal obligations in relation to housing provided for coal-miners were difficult to put into effect. It was sometimes stated that the houses were to be left in their "original state" but this was impossible to define or ascertain, especially if a prolonged period of time had elapsed since the houses were built. The precise meaning of the

¹⁹ Paton, G.C.H. and Cameron, J.G.S., *Op. cit.* p. 77.

phrases "good tenantable condition" and "good habitable condition" were never defined. With long leases the issue was further complicated as original parties were often dead, or the buildings had been taken over by another company through amalgamation.

As well as being responsible for housing under their jurisdiction, coal companies were often liable for damage, caused by the underground workings or subsidence, to surface property feued to other tenants. Coal owners were sometimes called upon by the landed proprietor to compensate feuers for damage. In the Bandrum Estate lease referred to earlier, concern was expressed over possible damage to houses at the surface. The Wilson and Clyde Coal Company who were party to the lease, sought through negotiation, to ensure that the lordship offered to the proprietor would protect them from all responsibility regarding the surface.²⁰

4.4. Mineral leases and miners' housing in the twentieth century.

When the State became involved in working class housing and began to dictate standards of accommodation, layout, design and amenities, it was inevitable that its demands would affect company provision of housing. In this local authorities were, in the minds of coal companies, external forces interfering in the relationship between the landed proprietor and the coal operator. As a result parties to a mineral lease were no longer free to "run up" workers houses when and where they chose. The cost of improvements demanded by the local authorities often acted as a deterrent

²⁰ SRO GRH GD 1/142/2/39: Copy of letter, dated 23 Nov. 1912, from Wilson and Clyde Coal Company to C.D. Geddes, Esq., Edinburgh, offering to take a lease of the minerals belonging to Mr. Aytoun's trustees.

to companies who wished to be in a position to close the buildings rather than renovate and improve them, especially in circumstances where closure was of greater benefit to the company.

As a means of illustrating the difficulties and complications associated with housing provision in conjunction with mineral leases in the twentieth century, the following accounts are given of different leases, each between the Fife Coal Company Ltd. and a landowner. Examples of Fife Coal Company leases are used as the company kept detailed records and retained all of the correspondence on its mineral leases. The company's files provide a remarkable insight into the organisation and management of a large mining enterprise between the two World Wars. Not only did the legal correspondence on leases survive, but also internal memoranda and notes between Charles Carlow and his son Charles Augustus Carlow, and between staff at the company's Head Office at Leven and branches in Cowdenbeath. These records are useful as the company was typical of a mining operation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike landed coal companies such as Wemyss and Fordell, the Fife Coal Company had to lease minerals, surface land and housing, or else obtained the right to erect housing on the land. Family run and landed firms like Wemyss and Fordell did not have the same problems or outlays as they owned the land and the minerals. That is not to say, however, that such companies never entered into mineral leases; they did lease some of their peripheral coal mines to surrounding companies. In such cases however they were always the net beneficiaries.

The first leases considered covered Kelty and Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle in west Fife. They are dealt with together as both are similar except in specific areas referred to. The Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle mineral leases were between the company, the mineral tenant, and Lord Moray, the

proprietor of the land under which the coal extraction took place and upon which the houses were built.²¹ The original leases of the minerals and houses dated from 1890 with agreements in 1897, 1901 and 1905 and with breaks for renegotiation at regular intervals. All of the workers' houses dealt with were in the west Fife villages of Kelty, Donibristle, Lumphinnans, Dalbeath, Hill of Beath, Benarty, Lassodie Mill, Blairadam and Lochore, and were of three types; (1) houses built by Lord Moray before the lease was taken out in 1890 and for which the Fife Coal Company paid £28 per annum; (2) houses built by the Fife Coal Company after 1890 under the stipulation of the lease; and (3) houses on sites for which land was feued by the earl of Moray to the company. The leases are examined in two sections; the first deals with the revision of the lease in 1914-16 and the second deals with the revision of 1928-29.

The second lease considered is that of the Blairenbathie Estate and concerns the termination in 1928 of a lease of mineral and houses and the return of the houses to the proprietor.²² The correspondence that revolved around these leases highlights the concerns of all parties involved, but in particular the anxiety of the coal company to protect itself from liability in relation to the condition of workers' housing.

4. 5. The Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease; 1914-1916

[The lease of] " coal and other minerals under a portion of the Barony of Beath called the Kelty Mineral Field, with certain workmens' houses and other buildings and coal and other minerals under subject in

²¹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease 1915-16.

²² SRO WRH CB3/157: Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease 1927-29.

the Parishes of Dalgety, Aberdour and Auchtertool called the Donibristle Mineral Field, with certain workmens' houses and other houses and buildings to be signed as relative thereto and that for the purpose of the said leases there is to be set against the said houses and other buildings in the said lists a sum of money being the value of the houses and other buildings as at the term of Martinmas 1914 which is the time of entry if the tenants under the said lease "23

The lease was subject to a break in 1914 to allow either side to renegotiate or to terminate it if so desired. As shall be seen in the following account of the negotiations each party was supported by solicitors, agents, factors and architects. The Local Authority, in this instance, Fife County Council, (also sometimes referred to herein after as "the sanitary authorities"), was not directly involved in the provision of these houses or in the revision of the lease, but could have at any time made demands on the company in relation to housing standards and condition and therefore had to be considered in the lease negotiations. The parties directly involved in the negotiations over the lease on the owners side were; Lord Moray, the proprietor of the Land; Gillespie and Patterson, W.S. Edinburgh, solicitors to Lord Moray; and the Honourable William J. Hewitt, Lord Moray's factor. Reference is also made to the Honourable John Stewart, curator for the Earl of Moray in 1855. On the mineral tenants side were the following; the Fife Coal Company Ltd.; Charles Augustus Carlow, General Manager of the company; Charles Carlow, father of the above and Managing Director of the company since its foundation in 1873; Mr. Walker, secretary to the company; Messrs. Davidson and Syme W.S. solicitors to the company; and D.W. Robertson of Cowdenbeath, company architect. Other parties involved were Mr. Gemmel, of Landale, Frew and Gemmel, Engineers and Mr. Alexander Todd, Master of Works to the Wemyss Coal Company in

²³ SRO WRH CB3/156: Extract of a letter from Gillespie and Patterson, W.S. to the Rt. Hon. Morton Gray, Earl of Moray.

east Fife, who was appointed as arbiter in the dispute over the valuation of houses.

The 1914 break in the lease was viewed by both parties as the means of negotiating the maximum protection possible. Along with housing, several other aspects of the lease were under review, including compensation to third parties as a result of subsidence caused by the working of minerals and the question of royalties on minerals extracted. The Fife Coal Company's aim was to ensure, as far as possible, that the extraction of coal and the provision and maintenance of workers' houses was as cheap as possible and that upon the termination of the lease they would not be held responsible for the condition of the workers' houses, but could either sell them to the proprietor at an agreed valuation or demolish them. They also sought to protect themselves against liability for damage to properties other than their own, or to surface land. Lord Moray, on the other hand aimed to extract the maximum royalty for minerals won on his property and to reduce as far as possible the likely cost of taking over workers' houses upon expiry of the lease and to protect himself from responsibility to the local authority for the condition of housing on his land.

4. 5. 1. Negotiation

In August 1915, the Fife Coal Company solicitors Davidson and Syme sent the company a draft of the lease which had been sent to them by Lord Moray's solicitors, and suggested amendments and alterations to the company's benefit.²⁴ This letter was followed by almost two years of regular

²⁴ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 17 Aug. 1915 from Davidson and Syme W.S. to the General Manager of the Fife Coal Company.

and close correspondence concerning housing on the property. The solicitors proposed that a clause should be inserted in the lease in order to;

"limit the damages to the houses or buildings presently on the lands and to declare that the provisions are only intended to keep the landlord skaitless and that you [the Fife Coal Company] will not be liable for any claims by third parties not involving liability to the landlord."²⁵

The solicitors also drew the company's attention to the insertion of a clause making specific reference to streams, watering places, wells or water supply, which had not been written into the old lease. They recommended however that this clause should be accepted as the coal company was responsible to the sanitary authorities as well as to the landlord for the condition of houses.

Preliminary correspondence on the lease was followed by a meeting to discuss terms between William Hewitt, agent to Lord Moray and Charles Carlow the Managing Director of the coal company.²⁶ During this exchange of views it became clear that a major cause for concern on both sides was the clause in the lease relating to the adjustment to "the present value" of the workers' houses which had to be inserted in each lease and adjusted at the time of each renegotiation. The inclusion of this clause was necessary as the landlord, if he so wished, could take back the houses leased by the company by paying the company the difference between their value when the leases was drawn up and their value when the lease expired.

²⁵ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 17 Aug. 1915 from Davidson and Syme to the Fife Coal Company Ltd.

²⁶ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 23 Aug. 1915 from the Fife Coal Company to the Hon. W.J. Hewitt and Messrs. Landale, Frew and Gemmel.

In a letter to Gillespie and Patterson from Davidson and Syme accompanied by a draft of the new lease and a list of the cottages concerned [Table 4.1] the Coal Company accepted the insertion of the reference to water supply added to the damages clause and agreed to permit these to remain, on condition that the obligation as to responsibility for houses was limited to houses already on the land.²⁷ They also inserted a clause stating that the tenant would not be liable for, and might resist, any claims by third parties not involving liability to the landlord. The letter further noted that the valuation of the houses had to be updated and suggested that rather than the solicitors to both parties being involved, it should be left to qualified representatives of both parties to undertake the valuation.

In a personal letter, dated September 1st. 1915 Charles Carlow suggested to William Hewitt that the valuation of the houses should be set at the date when the arrangements were made.²⁸ This was the date at which the memorandum which bore the phrase "houses to be valued now" was adjusted. Carlow was concerned that since the date of the memorandum, Martinmas 1914, the value of houses and building materials had increased as a result of the outbreak of the First World War. This meant that the difference between the value of the houses upon termination of the lease and their value in 1915 was likely to be less than the difference if the valuation was set at pre-war prices. Carlow displayed further anxiety over the level of the valuation of the houses and suggested that it may be difficult to find one man to undertake the valuation who would "take a

²⁷ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 38 Aug. 1915 from Davidson and Syme to Gillespie and Patterson.

²⁸ SRO WRH CB3/156 : Letter dated 1 Sept. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

moderate view and be fair to both parties".²⁹ He therefore proposed that two men should carry out the work. Hewitt responded by stating that the valuation date should be taken as the date at which the new arrangements would come into force and recommended only one arbiter as two would increase the cost.³⁰

In late September it was agreed that the Fife Coal Company should submit a list of the names of possible arbiters and that Hewitt should choose one of these. Again the coal company insisted that the valuation should be on the basis of rulings before the war and reminded Hewitt that banks and financial houses valued their assets on the basis of prices prevalent on 30 July 1914, i.e. before hostilities commenced, and stated that it would be unfair to allow the "momentary" influence of the war to affect the valuation of miners' houses.³¹

D. W. Robertson, architect to the company and based in Cowdenbeath, was then requested to furnish the list of possible arbiters, one of which would be chosen to value the properties.³² Robertson submitted the following names; Andrew Wilson, Builder Cowdenbeath; Robert Park, Builder Motherwell; Thomas Chambers, Contractor Motherwell; and J. Hall Nicol, Contractor Hamilton. Park was "a man of standing" in the community and an ex-provost of Motherwell. Chambers ran a large building business and Hall

²⁹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 15 Sept. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

³⁰ SRO WRH CB3/156: Reply from W.J. Hewitt dated 18 Sept. 1915.

³¹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 20 Sept. 1915 from the Fife Coal Company to W.J. Hewitt.

³² SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 23 Sept. 1915 from the Fife Coal Company to D.W. Robertson, Architect, Cowdenbeath.

Nicol was well known as a contractor and speculative builder. Wilson was described as the company's "own man".³³ On 2 October 1915 Charles Augustus Carlow wrote to Hewitt suggesting, as his father had done, that a man representing each party should be appointed as arbiter and also that the deed of reference pertaining to valuation should be adjusted to show on what basis the valuation was to be made.³⁴ The company was anxious that the valuation should not only take into account the cubic content of the walls and the value of materials of which the houses were built into account, as the measurement of value as the price of materials had increased with the war. On the same day Charles Augustus Carlow wrote to the company solicitors to keep them informed on negotiations with Hewitt and this letter outlines clearly the company's efforts to protect itself from loss of revenue from expenditure on housing. The letter stated the following ;

"We are bound to keep the houses in good habitable condition and at the end of the lease, if the landlord wishes to take over the houses, he is to pay to us the value of the houses less the present value and we are bound to take over all responsibility in connection with the repair and improvement as may be required by the County Council"

[Therefore] " . . . it must be made clear that we are free to refuse to reconstruct or improve the houses to the requirements of the authorities if we consider it inadvisable to do so. Circumstances might arise where the cost of the improvement might be undesirable for us to make the improvement, and preferable for us to let the houses be closed. This option must be clearly established. Then should, at the end of the lease, the houses be of less value than they were at the beginning

³³ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 29 Sept. 1915 from D.W. Robertson to Charles Augustus Carlow.

³⁴ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 29 Sept. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

of the lease, we must not be liable to make up to the Landlord the deficiency in value. All the provisions are for the payment of money by the Landlord to us, in no case can the payment be in the other direction."³⁵

Davidson and Syme replied immediately and reminded Carlow that according to the lease the obligation was to keep the houses in good habitable condition and repair and that the company had power to reconstruct the houses as they considered necessary.³⁶ In legal terms the obligation to keep the houses in good repair did not mean that the company would have to reconstruct or rebuild when it became necessary. The solicitors did however advise that there was no harm in specifically stating in the draft lease that the company was to be entitled to close the houses if they so wished.

It was further noted that the tenant undertook to intimate to the County Council of Fifeshire in writing that they would undertake all responsibility in connection with the repair and improvement (sanitary or otherwise) of all of the workers' houses let with the lease and to free the landlord from responsibility connected with the houses. The coal company also had to state that they would in no case permit or suffer any of the houses let under the lease, or those built at some future date, to be inhabited or occupied so long as objection was taken thereto by the sanitary authorities. Although concern was expressed that this might represent a future obligation on the coal company it was ultimately agreed that the limitation in the last mentioned clause prevented this as closure of the uninhabitable houses would remove the County Council's right to object.³⁷ The coal company

³⁵ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 2 Oct. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to Messrs. Davidson and Syme.

³⁶ SRO WRH CB3/156: Reply dated 4 Oct. 1915 with postscript of 5 Oct.

³⁷ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 6 Oct. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

was therefore not compelled to reconstruct or renovate houses if requested to do so by the sanitary authorities, but had the option to either execute the work or allow the dwellings to be closed. If the company failed to keep any of the houses which did not require reconstruction or improvement, then it would be liable for damages for not doing so, but when reconstruction or improvement was necessary and the company closed the houses rather than repair them, they would not be liable. This suggests that it was to the company's advantage not to repair houses during the time period of the lease.

At the end of the first stage of the lease negotiations it was agreed by both parties that the Kelty and Leuchatsbeath leases should run concurrently from Martinmas 1914 for twenty years with a break in 1918 and every four years thereafter. The section of the draft lease that dealt with miners' housing recorded the following;

"All of the houses other than those at Kelty which have already been feued to the Fife Coal Company, to be valued before anything is spent on them and the sum left after deducting this value from their value at the end of the new lease to be paid the lessees if the houses are then taken over by the proprietor or the incoming tenant, if not, a feu will, if required by the lessees, be granted for houses (including the houses at Shiells Farm held by the Company under the farm lease) at the rate of £10 per acre. The lessees to keep the houses in good habitable condition and repair and to have power to reconstruct should they consider it necessary, but in no case shall they permit or suffer any of the houses to be inhabited so long as objection is taken thereto by the Sanitary Authorities. The lessees agree forthwith to intimate in writing to the County Council that they have taken over all responsibility in connection with the repair and improvement (sanitary and otherwise) of all the workmens' houses, and to free the proprietor

from all and every responsibility connected with the same."³⁸

The Donibristle lease was identical in all but a stipulation that a feu would if required by the lessees, be granted for houses in Donibristle village and for the colliery office and manager's house, failing agreement by an arbitrator. Once the forementioned was agreed in principle the next step in negotiation was to carry out the valuation of the properties.

4. 5. 2. Valuation

Despite the agreement that a third party should value the houses and the submission by the Fife Coal Company of a list of possible candidates for the post, Charles Carlow continued to press that W.J. Hewitt, factor to Lord Moray, and D.W. Robertson, architect to the Fife Coal Company, should endeavour to agree upon the valuation before calling in an oversman.³⁹ In December 1915 Hewitt and Robertson met at Kelty to discuss the valuation but several difficulties arose in relation to the houses to be included in the valuation.⁴⁰ According to the correspondence exchanged on the issue Hewitt proposed to include a list of the houses built by the Fife Coal Company, under the powers of the previous lease without feuing the ground upon which the houses stood, as well as those built before 1890 by Lord Moray. There were two groups of miners' houses at Kelty; those belonging to the Earl of Kelty and let to the Fife Coal Company under the 1890 lease (this included houses at Pleasance, Clayhole, Earls Row, Old

³⁸ SRO WRH CB3/156: Extract from the draft lease contained in a letter dated 6 Oct. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

³⁹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 30 Oct. 1915 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁴⁰ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 23 Dec. 1915 to W.J. Hewitt, being a report on the meeting between D.W. Robertson and Hewitt's representatives at Kelty.

Office, four houses at Viewforth, and some buildings at No. 1 pit) and those houses built since 1890 by the coal company under powers of the lease and without feuing the sites (houses at Lindsay Row, Lindsay Cottages, Viewforth, Rowan Cottage and No. 1 pit).⁴¹ If these houses were included they would have been viewed as the property of Lord Moray and upon expiry of the lease the company would only receive an increment in value due to the improvements which they may have made to the houses between 1914 and the termination of the lease. The company felt that this was neither right nor fair, and felt that at the end of the lease the houses should either be taken over by the landlord or an incoming tenant at valuation, or the ground on which they stood should be feued there and then to the Fife Coal Company.⁴² Carlow could see no reason to feu the sites of houses erected by the Fife Coal Company and felt that the arrangement should only apply to houses owned by Lord Moray for which the coal company paid £28 per annum. The company was then paying £3 per acre; this figure would have risen to £10 per acre if the land was feued.

Hewitt replied that these houses would become the property of the landlord on termination of the lease as they were built on his property under the terms of the old lease, but he was willing to allow the 2.78 acres occupied by these houses to be feued to the company at £10 per acre, even though the land was valued at £12 per acre.⁴³

⁴¹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 12 Jan. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁴² SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 16 Jan. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to J. Gemmel.

⁴³ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 13 Jan. 1916 from J.W. Hewitt to Charles Augustus Carlow.

The Fife Coal Company eventually acceded to pressure and in a letter to Hewitt dated 4 February 1916, Charles Augustus Carlow agreed to feu the sites of all the houses let under the old lease.⁴⁴ There were now two categories of houses covered in the lease; houses built under the lease and houses built on feued ground. In a letter of the same date from Davidson & Syme to C Augustus Carlow the latter was advised that, once feued, houses that originally were included in the rent under the lease, would be outside the lease altogether, except in relation to the right of the landlord to take them over at the end of the lease.⁴⁵ The feuduty would therefore continue to run even if the house turned out to be valueless once the lease expired.

In order to cover themselves the company was advised to insist that if the landlord chose to take over houses he would take all in a row and not select those in good condition, and that the Company would have the right to close houses rather than repair them. This clause also covered them in relation to the stipulation that they inform the County Council of Fifeshire that they would undertake all responsibility for repair and improvement to all workers' houses.

This was accepted by Hewitt on condition that the houses at Lindsey Row and Cottages were feued immediately and also that houses at Shiells farm which were part of an agricultural lease, were valued and placed under the new lease.⁴⁶ The introduction of the agricultural lease raised further

⁴⁴ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 4 Feb. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁴⁵ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 4 Feb, 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to Davidson and Syme.

⁴⁶ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 8 Feb. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to J.W. Hewitt.

difficulties. The coal company was willing to feu the houses at £10 per acre but the Shiells farm houses were held under an entirely different lease. These were originally the property of Lord Moray but were converted to dwelling houses by the Fife Coal Company. An exchange of letters followed throughout the month of February in which Hewitt claimed that, as the houses were then miners' cottages, they should be included in the mineral lease.⁴⁷ The coal company on the other hand regarded them as completely separate as part of the agricultural lease.⁴⁸ Charles Augustus Carlow eventually agreed to the valuation of the farm houses on condition that they were valued again at the end of the lease and that the coal company was recompensed for expenditure on the dwellings in the intervening time.⁴⁹ Hewitt disagreed on the basis that the company had been permitted to convert the buildings to miners' houses on condition that they be restored to farm cottages when they were given up. As the houses would be of little value to Lord Moray if returned as miners' cottages he insisted that they be included with the mineral lease. There ended correspondence on this issue; the company was obliged to feu the land under the houses on Shiells farm along with Lindsay Row and Cottages, Kelty.

Meanwhile the dispute over the valuation of the houses continued. By 25 February it was clear that the representatives of both sides could not reach agreement on the valuation of the houses and Hewitt suggested that an independent oversman be called in.⁵⁰ On 29 February Alexander Todd,

⁴⁷ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letters dated 10, 14 and 19 Feb. 1916 from W.J. Hewitt to Charles Augustus Carlow.

⁴⁸ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 12 Feb. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁴⁹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 18 Feb. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁵⁰ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 25 Feb. 1916 from W.J. Hewitt to Charles Augustus Carlow.

Master of Works at Wemyss Coal Company, was requested to visit and value the miners' houses at Kelty and Donibristle.⁵¹ Todd was not one of the original names submitted, but was recommended by Gemmel, the mining engineer, as a man of suitable experience and expertise. He was described as "a practical man who had a great deal to do with the old and new houses at Wemyss".⁵² (See Section 1 of the Introduction to the thesis for details of the houses designed and built by Todd at Wemyss between 1890 and his death in 1916). However instead of resolving the issue his valuation led to even further rancour between the parties. Todd valued the houses at £6,452 having visited and examined the various lots of houses along with the arbiters Turnbull and Robertson, and after "taking the greatest pains to arrive at a fair and just price".⁵³ Hewitt had valued the properties at £7565, while Robertson had valued them at £4235. [see Tables 4.3 and 4.4]

The Fife Coal company accused Todd of merely splitting the difference between the arbiters valuation. Todd was also alleged to have taken no measurements of the houses or notes on their condition.⁵⁴ According to Robertson;

"Many of the houses will be closed if Mr. Todd adheres to the prices given. Better to build new houses than take

⁵¹ SRO WRH CB3/156; Letter dated 29 Feb. 1916 from Charles Augustus Carlow to Alex Tod.

⁵² SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 22 April 1916 from Charles Carlow Snr. to W.J. Hewitt.

⁵³ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 4 April 1916 from Alex. Todd to D.W. Robertson.

⁵⁴ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 22 April 1916 from Charles Carlow Snr. to J.W. Hewitt.

these old ones over and reconstruct them in accordance with the Sanitary Inspector's view."⁵⁵

Todd responded to Robertson and stated that a further visit to the houses was unnecessary as he had a clear conception of the make-up of all of the houses visited.⁵⁶ In reply to the assertion that the Sanitary Authorities might make demands that would lead to some of the houses been closed as unfit for habitation, Todd stated that this was an issue that could arise at any time. He sympathised with the Fife Coal Company in as much as "to build as many houses new would be a task, in this war time neither materials nor men could be had except at ruinous prices". However he was certain that the County Council would not turn out the men "at a rapid rate" to allow clearance for renovation or rebuilding.⁵⁷

Robertson had written his own report on Todd's valuation and this is worth quoting at length as an indication of the state of houses at the time.

"Report by D.W. Robertson on Awards by Mr. Alex Todd regarding the value of houses at Donibristle and Kelty.

6 April 1916.

Heath Cottages: No remarks

Ivy Cottage: This is a corner of the workshop and not a fit subject for occupation and to my mind the oversman's price is absurdly high.

⁵⁵ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 7 April 1916 from D.W. Robertson to Alex. Todd.

⁵⁶ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 13 April 1916 from Alex. Todd to D.W. Robertson.

⁵⁷ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 22 April 1916 from Alex. Todd to D.W. Robertson.

- Beech Cottage: This is the Office building of the Donibristle Company, which was converted to dwelling houses when the colliery changed hands. The buildings are substantial but I am of opinion my valuation is ample.
- Isa Cottage: Brick cottage, fairly good, although to my mind, valuation of the oversman is too high.
- Frosty Mountains
Catherine Cottage
Half Loaf
Nabby Row
Standmaline
Earls Row
Old School House
Den Cottage
School Row
Ainslie Square
Toll Row
Moss Row
- All old stone houses and in more or less insanitary condition and have been under the observation of the Sanitary Inspector for some years.
One in the Nabby Row is closed. I am quite sure these will all be brought to our notice as soon as conditions are again normal and reconstruction will be demanded. I say they are only of value for the rents the Company is likely to get out of them before the Sanitary Inspector acts.
- Moray Cottages
James Street
- Those are in a fair state but have no modern conveniences, are damp and have brick floors in the kitchens. They will also cost something to bring up to modern times and I valued them at what I considered a reasonable figure.
- Bucklyvie Cottage: Brick cottage requiring a good deal of improvement in its construction. Damp walls which will cost a good deal to cure, although I anticipate things can be made right by harling the outer surfaces.
- Marion Row: Those houses are situated at the James Pit and have no road to them, the only access being by the railway sidings. They were built in 1873 and have no conveniences of

any kind. My valuation was £46. 10/- for the lot and I am satisfied they will not be allowed to remain in occupancy for any length of time. To put £188 on them is absurd.

Institute Offices: I refuse to put this building on the list. I refuse to make a valuation on this subject as I do not think it should be on the list. I am of opinion it has been confused with the old offices already valued.

Shields, Kelty: Those are the only houses dealt with in Kelty. The Valuation of the Farm House and Farm Cottar buildings are reasonable, but the Cottar Houses are considerable overstated at £90. My valuation of £20 is ample, as the Sanitary Authorities have already threatened to close them, so the only remedy is reconstruction and the old materials are of no value.

(signed)

D.W. Robertson.⁵⁸

Charles Augustus Carlow, in a letter to W.J. Hewitt, dated 24 April 1916 accused Mr. Todd of not applying his mind to each individual case with the result that;

" some of the oldest of the houses are put in at such a value that it is very unlikely that further money will be spent upon them, and they most likely will be closed within a few years; while, had the value been lower it might have been worth while to rebuild them when the time comes. This, as you mentioned at the telephone, is the Landlord's risk, but we would rather

⁵⁸ SRO WRH CB3/156: Report by D.W. Robertson regarding the valuation of houses at Donibristle and Kelty by A. Todd.

that the valuation had been more reasonable, so that it would have been profitable for us to have rebuilt".⁵⁹

On the same day Hewitt replied to Charles Carlow and wrote a separate letter to Charles Augustus Carlow that they all must abide by the valuation and that as the next valuation was so far in the future it was unlikely to be of any consequence to any of them.⁶⁰ Charles Carlow then sent a note to his son saying that they could nothing but agree.⁶¹

In the end the Fife Coal Company and the representatives of Lord Moray came to an agreement, albeit not entirely to the company's satisfaction. The negotiations over the question of responsibility for housing was settled to their advantage in that they could choose to close houses rather than repair them. The question of valuation was settled to Lord Moray's advantage, as a high valuation implied a low differential cost in taking back the houses at the end of the lease. The coal company therefore was likely to gain little from investing further in the Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle workers houses.

The next section considers the same leases when they came up for renegotiation in 1927. What is interesting about the correspondence on this occasion is that it reveals that despite changes in working class housing in the aftermath of the Royal Commission of 1917 and in the light of post-

⁵⁹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letter dated 24 April 1916 from Charles Carlow to W.J. Hewitt.

⁶⁰ SRO WRH CB3/156: Letters dated 24 April 1916 from W.J. Hewitt to Charles Carlow Snr. and Charles Augustus Carlow.

⁶¹ SRO WRH CB3/156: Note dated 24 April 1916 from Charles Carlow to Charles Augustus Carlow.

World War 1 housing legislation, mineral leases remained practically unaffected.

4. 6. Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle Lease 1927-29.

In 1927 the lease between Moray Estates Development Company and the Fife Coal Company Ltd. came up for review again.⁶² The Development Company represented the land proprietor, the Rt. Hon. Morton Gray, Earl of Moray, and was incorporated under the Companies Act of 1917.⁶³ The lands covered in the lease were located in the Parish of Beath, Fife and included the Leuchatsbeath and Kelty mineral fields with pits at Dalbeath, Cowdenbeath, Foulford and Lumphinnans. The principal agents in the lease negotiations were again Davidson and Syme acting for the Fife Coal Company Ltd. and Messrs. Gillespie and Patterson acting for the landlord. Other parties mentioned in the correspondence were N. McArthur, Secretary of the Fife Coal Company, P.W. Brown a mining engineer with the company, Wm. Spalding, company agent and Messrs. Landale, Frew, Gemmel and Arnot, mining engineers, responsible for the plans of workings.

The lease was remarkably similar to the earlier version of 1914 and contained the usual clauses stipulating that the company would not have to pay royalties on coal supplied to colliery officials or workmen employed at the collieries and were bound to compensate feuers of houses for the cost of repair to houses damaged as a result of the underground workings. The

⁶² SRO WRH CB 3/157: Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle Lease 1927-1929.

⁶³ 7 & 8 Geo. 5. c. 18 and 28.

lease dealt in detail with worker' houses and it is in relation to these that it differs from earlier versions. In the draft lease proposed by the Fife Coal Company the following is stated in relation to workers' dwellings and other buildings:

"It is agreed that the tenants shall keep these in good habitable condition and repair (except such as the tenants may elect to close instead of repair); and they shall have power (but not be bound) to reconstruct the same as they may consider necessary and to build additional houses or other buildings The landlord shall have the option to take them over at the end or sooner termination of the lease on paying their then value (to be ascertained by arbitration. . .)"⁶⁴

Once again the coal company made every effort to acquire room to manoeuvre with regard to responsibility for repair and reconstruction. Here it is clearly stated that they would have the choice and power to reconstruct or close and are no longer bound to do either. Attempts were also made by the company to remove the clause concerning writing to the County Council.⁶⁵ However, the Landlord's agent insisted that it be retained but stated that "in the circumstances we might not press for your immediately implementing the obligation". (The circumstances referred to here were that the Fife Coal Company was at the time in dispute with the County Council over improvements to houses at Carlow Place Leven. The dispute lasted until 1935 and will be considered in detail in Chapter 10.) Davidson and Syme advised the company to leave matters as they were and not to write to the County Council until requested to do so, believing that it was

⁶⁴ SRO WRH CB3/157: Extract from Donibristle colliers lease (re. village of Donibristle, west Fife); Davidson and Syme, W.S., July 1927.

⁶⁵ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter dated 4 Oct. 1927 from D.W. Robertson, Architect to N. McArthur, Fife Coal Company, Leven.

unnecessary to bring the matter of housing to their attention.⁶⁶ This is a curious statement given that the local authorities had in the 1919 and subsequent Housing Acts been given full and direct responsibility for working class housing.

In July 1927 McArthur, Secretary to the coal company wrote to Charles Carlow Reid, manager of the company, giving details of the draft Donibristle Mineral lease and suggesting that D.W. Robertson, the company architect, should be asked to "look over" each property in order to ascertain whether each property mentioned in the lease was still in habitable condition.⁶⁷ Robertson was also to be requested to check whether the valuation of 1914 was in order. Robertson replied in September 1927 and explained that the housing situation was not as it had been in 1914. Seven houses at Earls Row Keltly had either been vacated or demolished, as had five at Nabby's Row, four at Marion Row and Ivy Cottage. Others were marked for closure, three already closed at Standmeline, one already and another due for closure at School Row. Robertson went on to state that Earls Row had been completely destroyed by the Earls Row mine workings and that the houses were no longer fit for reconstruction or to live in [Plate 8]. In relation to the valuation Robertson felt unable to comment.⁶⁸ It is possible that he recollected the difficulties over valuation in 1916.

In October Robertson was again pressed on the question of valuation and asked whether the remaining houses at Standmeline and School Row were

⁶⁶ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter of October 1927 from Davidson and Syme to N. McArthur.

⁶⁷ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter dated 7 July 1927 from N. McArthur to Charles Carlow Reid.

⁶⁸ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter dated 15 Sept. 1927 from D.W. Robertson to N. McArthur.

due for closure.⁶⁹ At the same time the company Solicitors wrote to McArthur explaining that under the lease being renounced and renegotiated, if the Landlord did not take over the houses and if the Fife Coal Company did not feu them, the tenant was entitled to remove them. However in the draft produced by the Earl of Moray's solicitors this clause had be amended to read "shall be bound if called upon by the Landlord to remove". The implication of this change in wording was that if the houses had not been feued during the lease, the Fife Coal Company would have to pay compensation to the Landlord for the sites. According to the solicitors it was unreasonable that the coal company should pay compensation and remove the houses, especially as it was unlikely that the value of the materials would repay the cost of removal.⁷⁰

Surviving records of correspondence on the leases end at this point. Although it is unclear how the subject was resolved it would appear that the same issues and problems existed in the late 1920s as before and during the First World War. Despite the War and State involvement in housing provision coal companies and land proprietors were still negotiating as if they were the only parties involved in workers' housing. At all times they attempted to keep their distance from the local authority and housing legislation. The only means of doing so was to avoid responsibility for housing condition.

In the next section some more aspects of mineral leases are considered. The section deals with another difficulty peculiar to colliery housing; the return of housing to a proprietor upon termination of a lease. The snippets of

⁶⁹ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter dated 14 Oct. 1927 from N. McArthur to D.W. Robertson.

⁷⁰ SRO WRH CB3/157: Letter from Davidson and Syme to the Fife Coal Company.

correspondence that survive concerning the return of the Blairadam houses are indications of managerial practice at the time.

4.7. The return of houses upon expiry of a lease; the case of Blairenbathie Estate, 1928.

The case of the houses at Blairadam and Kelty belonging to the Blairenbathie Estate and leased to the Fife Coal Company is of interest in that (1) it illustrates the complications that arose when a coal company returned houses to the proprietor and (2) it reveals a great deal about how badly the Fife Coal Company managed its housing property. It will become clear from the following that there was little negotiation between the offices of the company at Leven and Cowdenbeath except when leases were under review or terminated. As a result the Leven Head Office knew little about the condition of the company's houses or even exactly how many it owned. They also seem to have used valuation rolls rather than their own records as a means of ascertaining who the proprietor of land was or how much rent they should pay the owner. As a result they often paid rent biannually for houses that had been closed or removed from the lease, and in some instances to the wrong persons. The houses concerned here were again in west Fife and were in two groups; dwellings at Blairenbathie Rows Blairadam returned to the Landlord in June 1928; and other houses at Kelty which continued to be leased until 1930.



Plate 7 Fife Coal Company, houses at Waverley Street, Lochore. 16, 3 room houses and 32, 2 room houses, all with scullery and W.C., built in 1909.



Plate 8 Fife Coal Company houses at Earls Row, Kelty. 8, 2 room houses with scullery and W.C., built in 1914.

4.7.1. Blairenbathie Cottages, Blairadam.

In early July 1928 DW Robertson, architect to the Fife Coal Company, wrote to the Company Secretary, W. Walker notifying him that houses at Blairenbathie Rows Blairadam had been cleared of tenants, locked up and properly secured.⁷¹ The houses had been inspected in May 1928 by Mr. C Terris, factor to the coal company and were believed to be in good condition.⁷² Two days later on 5 July a dispute arose with the solicitors to the new tenant, Mr. Place, over the locking of the doors at the houses.⁷³ Walker wrote to A & P Deas, solicitors to Mr. Place, refusing to accept any claim in relation to the Blairadam houses. He went on to explain that the company had already paid rent for these houses when it was no longer necessary to do so and threatened to demand refund of money if there were any problems over the change-over. Deas replied immediately and outlined the situation as the new tenant of the houses saw it. Apparently Deas had met Robertson at the cottages while two other men from the Fife Coal Company were in the process of dismantling and removing a water fountain which Deas presumed to have been estate property. He further claimed that many of the doors were unlocked which gave the impression that the company had ". . . carelessly dealt with the question and property it had tenanted from the Blairadam Estate." It was further stated that the company still held the master key, the immediate return of which was demanded.⁷⁴

⁷¹ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 3 July 1928 from D.W. Robertson to W. Walker, Secretary to the Fife Coal Company.

⁷² SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 3 July 1928 from W. Walker to A and P Deas Solicitors to Mr. Place, the new owner.

⁷³ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 5 July 1928 from W. Walker to A and P Deas.

⁷⁴ SRO WRH CB3/164 : Letter dated 6 July 1928 from A and P Deas to W. Walker.

Walker wrote to Robertson and ascertained that the well had never supplied the houses as the water pressure was insufficient to rise to the well. Instead the water supply to the houses was via a stand pipe alongside the wall which had not been touched. The Fife Coal Company Factor had decided therefore to take possession of the redundant water fountain and remove it to a workshop. However upon intervention from Mr Deas it was left alone.⁷⁵ Walker then wrote to Deas advising him that the fountain was in fact Fife Coal Company property. Deas' response was merely to state that "from the state the cottages were left in it was impossible to close certain of the same" and to again demand the return of the master keys and the tenants' keys.⁷⁶ Robertson explained in a letter to Walker on 24 July that tenants never gave up their keys; "the class of people who occupied the houses did not worry about keys". In these circumstances the Factor had done his best to secure the properties.⁷⁷

The correspondence on the subject ended at this point. Although incomplete, the account shows the problems of ownership and condition that arose when houses changed hands. The next two sub-sections highlight the Fife Coal Company's ignorance of its housing property.

⁷⁵ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 10 July 1928 from D.W. Robertson to W. Walker.

⁷⁶ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 11 July 1928 from A and P Deas to W. Walker.

⁷⁷ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter from D.W. Robertson to W. Walker concerning the keys to Blairenbathie Cottages.

4.7.2. Miners' houses at Keltyhead and Church St. Kelty.

In November 1928 the Fife Coal Company received a demand from Dundas and Wilson, C.S. Edinburgh seeking payment of £27 on behalf of Sir Charles E Adams' Trustees for the rent of houses at Keltyhead for the half year to Whitsunday.⁷⁸ The company was paying the trustees of the late Sir C E Adams £54 per annum for the rent of fourteen houses at Keltyhead, Main St. Kelty. Originally twenty two had been leased with the Blairadam minerals for £70 a year. Another four dwellings at Church Street were leased with the minerals. In 1920 the company feued a piece of land and the feuduty was made to cover the price of one of these known as Clayhole Cottage. They had effectively bought this house from Sir Charles Adams and made alterations and improvements to it. This left three houses in Church St. that were part of the mineral lease. One of these was later converted to a wash house. The remaining two were condemned in 1928.

Confusion arose over the legal position concerning these two houses in Church Street as they had been purchased from Sir Charles by Mr. Thomas Place (the same person who took over the houses as Blairadam when they were vacated by the company). Mr Place's agent had informed the occupiers of the cottages that they should no longer pay rent to the company for these houses. However according to the valuation roll nos. 1 and 2 Church St. were still recorded as the property of Sir Charles Adams with the Fife Coal Company as tenants and no recorded rental.⁷⁹ Mr. Walker, Secretary to the company attempted to ascertain whether these two houses were among the

⁷⁸ SRO WRH CB3/164: Note from Dundas and Wilson, Edinburgh regarding payment to Sir Charles Adams Trustees of half a years rent to Whitsunday 1929.

⁷⁹ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 7 Nov.. 1929 from the Fife Coal Company to Dundas and Wilson.

22 held under the Blairadam mineral lease and therefore included in the demand for payment from Dundas and Wilson.

Mr. Rutherford, factor to the company replied and explained that there had originally been three houses at 1 and 2 Church St. and that they were among the 22 mentioned in the Blairadam Lease. Of these 22 the Company now only had tenancy of 16 as some were taken over by the Kelty Gas Company, and one was feued, while another had been converted to a wash house. The valuation roll also showed the two Church St. houses as condemned. Hence the £54 paid for the Blairadam houses covered 14 at Keltyhead and 2 at Church St. It later transpired that the two two-roomed houses at Church St. had been unoccupied since 15 Oct and 10 Dec 1928 respectively and had been barricaded in the meantime.⁸⁰ They were unlikely to be reopened. The company was therefore no longer obliged to pay rent for them.

The fourteen houses at Keltyhead, Main St. were all occupied by Fife Coal Company workmen. Rent was deducted regularly from their weekly wages except in the case of house no. 8 occupied by two brothers in their eighties; John and David Houston.⁸¹ These gentlemen paid no rent and had made repeated application to Mr. Charles Carlow to be relieved of rent. According to Anderson, the factor for the houses, "It would appear the Company has departed from granting such concessions".⁸² Walker was unaware of any

⁸⁰ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 31 Oct. 1929 from J. Anderson, factor to the Fife Coal Company to W. Walker.

⁸¹ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 31 Oct. 1929 from J. Anderson to W. Walker.

⁸² SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 31 Oct. 1929 from J. Anderson to W. Walker.

such application but noted that in the meantime the men were taking free rent.⁸³

Since the houses at Church St. had been condemned the coal company should not have paid rent for them at Whitsunday 1929. They therefore decided to deduct the sum of £3 10/- from the Martinmas settlement.⁸⁴ However it quickly transpired that the two houses at Church St. had formed part of the entailed estate which had been sold to Mr Thomas Place Jr. and therefore any correspondence should have been addressed to the new proprietors agents and not to Dundas and Wilson.⁸⁵ It was not known whether Mr Place had resold or not. The company was therefore corresponding with the wrong solicitors and continued to pay the old proprietor.

To add to the confusion over the Kelttyhead and Church St. houses, on 24 May 1930 the Fife Coal Company was instructed by Messrs. Brodie and Sons, WS Edinburgh, agents for Commander Adams of Blairadam to prepare for the handover of the factorship of nos. 1 to 15 Kelttyhead and nos. 1 and 2 Church St. as the lease of the houses terminated on 28 May 1930.⁸⁶ From then on the agents would collect the rent for the landlord directly from the tenants. On 28 May the cashier of the coal company was advised that Messrs

⁸³ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 1 Nov. 1929 from W. Walker to J. Anderson.

⁸⁴ SRO WRH CB3/164: letter dated 1 Nov. 1929 from W. Walker to Dundas and Wilson.

⁸⁵ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated Nov. 1929 from J.C. Brodie and Sons agents for the proprietors of Blairadam to the Fife Coal Company.

⁸⁶ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 24 May 1930 from J.C. Brodie and Sons. to D.W. Robertson.

HM Pearson would collect rent on behalf of the proprietor from Saturday 7 June 1930 and that as a result no rent was to be deducted from the workmens' wages after 28 May.⁸⁷ J. Dryburgh the cashier notified Head Office that five tenants were in arrears of rent and rates, as follows:

Hugh Wallace of 3 Keltyhead	Rent 27/10	Rates 11/1
Mrs Mitchell of 4 Keltyhead	78/4	9d
Matthew Philp of 5 Keltyhead	154/5	56/5
John Houston of 8 Keltyhead	518/3	2 45/-
Wm. Harley of 9 Keltyhead	9/6	4/5. ⁸⁸

The company was hopeful of collecting the arrears in all cases but that of the £38:3:3 owed by John Houston. Again it was reiterated by J. Anderson, the factor, that John and David Houston were old men and had applied repeatedly to be relieved of rent.⁸⁹ The company attempted to collect the arrears due by deducting a proportion from the workers' wages after the houses had been handed back to the landlord. They had not however explained this to the occupants, who refused to pay the new rent collectors as they believed they had already paid their rent. The correspondence on this subject ended with the company explaining their actions to Commander Adams' solicitors.

With the handover of the houses the Fife Coal Company had no alternative but to look upon the arrears of rent and rates as irrecoverable.

⁸⁷ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 28 May 1930 from W. Walker to the Company cashier at Kelty, J. Dryburgh.

⁸⁸ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter from J. Dryburgh to W. Walker.

⁸⁹ SRO WRH CB3/164: Letter dated 6 June 1930 from J. Anderson to W. Walker.

Given the situation outlined above it is hardly surprising that this had to be the case.

4.8. Conclusion.

In the Kelty, Leucatsbeath and Donibristle lease of 1915/16 between the Fife Coal Company Ltd. and the Earl of Moray it was written into the contract that the company was bound to keep any houses they erected in good habitable condition and at the end of the lease the landlord if he chose to do so could take over the houses by paying the company their then value less their value at the commencement of the lease. The company was also bound to take full responsibility for repairs and improvements to the houses that may be required by the County Council. The coal company however wished to be free to refuse to reconstruct or improve the houses to the authorities' requirements, if they considered it inadvisable to do so. It was also stated in the lease that if the houses should be of less value at the end of the lease than they were at the beginning, the company would not be liable to make up the difference to the landlord. Payments were always to be in the other direction only. The value of the houses was stated in each lease and hence with each renegotiation of the contract they had to be revalued.

The valuation settled upon was of great importance to both sides as the proprietor had to pay the difference between the old and new valuation to the coal company. In the Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease the Fife Coal Company wanted the houses to be valued as of Martinmas 1914 as the price of building materials and wages had increased with the war. The managing director of the company, Charles Augustus Carlow felt that the houses should be valued on the basis of similar houses valued before the war artificially raised prices. Since both sides failed to agree the valuation it

was decided to appoint an independent arbiter. After some discussion Alexander Todd, the Clerk of Works at the Wemyss Coal Company, was appointed. His valuation dissatisfied the company with the result that they refused to spend any more on the houses on the grounds that they would receive little return for any improvements to the properties. The whole issue of property valuation was of course dependent upon the economic climate of the day. It is evident from the correspondence on leases that all sides assumed that houses would increase in value. There was no mention of devaluation of property or of money.

The Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle lease came up for revision in 1925. Again it was stated that the tenant, the Fife Coal Company, was bound to keep workers' houses and all other buildings let with the minerals in good habitable condition. This however did not apply to houses that the company elected to close rather than repair. The company was given power (but, was not bound) to reconstruct houses and to build additional houses if required. The landlord still retained the option to take over the houses at the end or earlier termination of the lease by paying the company their then value.

Between the previous lease of 1916 and the lease of 1925 seven houses in Earls Row, five at Nabby's Row, one at Ivy Cottage and four at Marions Row had been either vacated or demolished. A further three at Standmeline and one at Old School had been closed with another two due to be shut up. The houses at Earls Row had been completely destroyed by the underground workings at Earls Row mine. None of the houses mentioned were considered fit for reconstruction.

In the other lease, this time of the Blairenbathie minerals, between the Fife Coal Company and the Trustees of the late Sir C. E. Adams, the houses were owned by the proprietor and leased with the minerals. There were originally twenty two houses let with this lease; eighteen at Keltyhead and four at Church Street Kelty. By 1928 this figure had been reduced to sixteen; four had been condemned by the sanitary authority and the Kelty Gas Company had acquired the others. The agents of the trustees had collected £27 every half year in rent from the company for the houses. At the termination of the lease in 1929 the houses were returned to the proprietors. Some were vacant lots but others were occupied by Fife Coal Company workers and their families. From June 1929 they paid rent to the factor of Moray Estates Development Company instead of having it deducted from their wages.

Changes in company policy towards the provision of workers' houses can be traced in the mineral leases between coal companies and proprietors of the minerals and surface. Until the end of the nineteenth century mineral leases were the concern of these two parties alone. However, with the intervention of government in health and social welfare and inevitably in tenure of land and property, coal owners and operators were no longer free to act independently. In the early years of the twentieth century coal companies were under pressure from the land owners, from the local authorities and from their own shareholders. Investment in workers' houses became a costly business with little guarantee of a financial return.

The evidence of mineral leases will be raised again in Chapters 9 and 10 when dealing with the actions of coal companies after the First World War and during the Royal Commissions on the Coal Industry in 1919 and 1925. When presenting evidence to the Royal Commissions, Scottish coal-owners

gave every impression of commitment to workers' houses. It shall be shown that this was merely a matter of political expediency. They defended housing provision as they viewed an attack on the management of housing as an attack on the management of the industry. This indeed was the case. Poor quality and ill managed housing was used by the miners' union as an argument for the nationalisation of the industry.

Scottish coal companies did build new workers houses after the First World War but on a very small scale, often only two or three per colliery. Without admitting it publicly, by 1925 coal companies had ceased to regard workers' housing as their responsibility. Mineral leases provide a good indication of this. Coal companies and proprietors alike did everything in their power to shed responsibility for housing. There was no guarantee of return for investment and no guarantee or reparation in the form of valuation payment. Income from occupiers' rents and rates was also unstable and many were in arrears which were later written off.

Table 4.1 Kelty and Donibristle Colliery Houses and Gardens 1927*Properties covered under the Kelty, Leucatsbeath & Donibristle Lease***Plan A**

Earls Row	6 houses of 2 rooms 1 house of 1 room
Standmaline Cottages	2 houses of 2 rooms 1 house of 1 room

Plan B

Old School House	2 houses of 2 rooms
Post Office	2 houses of 1 room
School Row	8 houses of 2 rooms
Moray Cottages	13 houses of 2 rooms
Toll Row	6 houses of 2 rooms
Craigies Row	6 houses of 2 rooms
James Street	18 houses of 2 rooms
Bucklyvie Cottage	1 house of 3 rooms
Nabbys Row	3 houses of 2 rooms 2 houses of 1 room

Frosty Mountains	4 houses of 2 rooms
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Plan C

Moss Row	8 houses of 2 rooms
Catherine Cottage	2 houses of 2 rooms
Half Loaf	1 house of 1 room
Heath Cottage	1 house of 4 rooms
Store and Offices	3 rooms
Isa Cottage	1 house of 3 rooms

Old Offices	1 house of 3 rooms 1 house of 2 rooms
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House at Workshops	1 house of 3 rooms
Sidney House (empty)	1 house of 1 room

Plan D

Marion Row	4 houses of 2 rooms
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Source SRO WRH CB3/156

(Note: Illustrations of Plans A,B,C,D were missing from file CB3/156)

Table 4.2. Houses at Kelty and it's environs referred to in the lease*Kelty Houses***Plan A**

Earls Row	(feu)	8 houses of 2 rooms & scullery (reconstructed full breath of old buildings back from road)
Clayhole	(feu)	2 houses of 4 rooms & bathroom 1 house of 5 rooms & bathroom (reconstructed on site of old houses)
Pleasance	(feu)	6 houses of 2 rooms & scullery (reconstructed on old site)
Old Office or Cottage	(feu)	1 house of 3 rooms
No.1 Pit Cottage	(feu)	2 rooms & scullery (new house erected in place of maintaining old workshop)

Plan B

Viewfield		(3 rows of houses) 4 houses of 1 room & small closet
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Plan C

Sheills Farm House		6 rooms, closet, scullery & bathroom
Sheills Steading		10 houses of 2 rooms 2 houses of 2 rooms 2 houses of 1 room

Plan D

Corner of road to Hilton Farm		4 houses of 3 rooms & scullery
Lindsay Pit (opposite above)	(No details given)	

Source: SRO WRH CB 3/156

Table 4.3. Alexander Todd's Valuation of Miners Housing at Kelty and Donibristle

	<i>Valuation for Lord Moray</i>	<i>Valuation for F.C.C</i>	<i>Valuation by A Todd</i>
Kelty Houses			
<u>Shiells Farm houses</u> (6 rooms & scullery)	£275:0:0	£275:0:0	£275:0:0
<u>Shiells Steading</u> (10 houses of 2 rooms & 2 houses of 1 room)	£639:0:0	£500:0:0	£592:10:0
<u>Shiells Cottages</u> (2 houses of 2 rooms)	£125:0:0	£ 20:0:0	£ 90:0:0
<i>Total Kelty Houses</i>	<u>£1039:0:0</u>	<u>£795:0:0</u>	<u>£957:0:0</u>
Donibristle Houses			
<u>Heath Cottage</u> (6 rooms & servant's room)	£325:0:0	£290:0:0	£313:6:8
<u>Ivy Cottage</u> (1 house, 3 rooms & scullery)	£ 75:0:0	£ 26:0:0	£ 58:13:4
<u>Beech Cottage</u> (1 house, 3 rooms & scullery)	£350:0:0	£250:0:0	£316:13:4
<u>Isa Cottage</u> (1 house, 3 rms, bath & scullery)	£270:0:0	£132:0:0	£224:0:0
<u>Frosty Mountains</u> (4 houses of 2 rooms)	£198:0:0	£ 80:0:0	£158:13:4
<u>Catherine Cottage</u> (1 house, 3 rooms & scullery)	£ 95:0:0	£ 25:0:0	£ 71:13:4
<u>Half Loaf</u> (1 house of 1 room)	£ 17:0:0	£ 6:10:0	£ 13:10:0
<u>Nabby's Row</u> (3 houses, 2 rms & 2 at 1 rm)	£175:0:0	£ 70:10:0	£140:3:4

	<i>Valuation for Lord Moray</i>	<i>Valuation for F.C.C.</i>	<i>Valuation by A Todd</i>
<u>Stand-ma-line</u> (1 house of 4 rms, 1 of 3 rms, 1 of 2 rms & 1 of 1 rm)	£285:0:0	£ 52:0:0	£207:6:8
<u>Earls Row</u> (6 houses of 2 room)	£305:0:0	£ 98:0:0	£233:6:8
<u>Old School House</u> (2 houses of 2 rooms)	£150:0:	£ 45:0:0	£115:0:0
<u>Den Cottage</u> (2 houses of 1 room)	£ 78:0:0	£ 30:0:0	£ 62:0:0
<u>School Row</u> (7 houses of 2 rms & 1 of 1 rm)	£370:0:0	£132:0:0	£290:13:4
<u>Moray Cottages</u> (13 houses of 2 rooms)	£696:0:0	£325:0:0	£572:6:8
<u>Bucklyvie</u> (1 house of 2 rms & scullery)	£115:0:0	£ 90:0:0	£106:13:4
<u>Ainslie Square</u> (6 houses of 2 rooms)	£322:0:0	£ 75:0:0	£239:13:4
<u>Toll Row</u> (6 houses of 2 rms & scullery)	£350:0:0	£ 85:0:0	£261:13:4
<u>James Street</u> (18 houses of 2 rooms)	£1090:0:0	£883:0:0	£1021:0:0
<u>Moss Row</u> (8 houses of 2 rms & scullery)	£495:0:0	£193:10:0	£394:10:0
<u>Marion Row</u> (4 houses of 2 rooms)	£260:0:0	£ 46:10:0	£188:13:4
<u>Institute</u> (Robertson did not include)	£380:0:0	£380:0:0	£380:0:0
<u>Offices</u> (Robertson did not include)	£125:0:0	£125:0:0	£125:0:0
<i>Total Donibristle houses</i>	<u>£6526:0:0</u>	<u>£3440:0:0</u>	<u>£5494:10:0</u>

	<i>Valuation for Lord Moray</i>	<i>Valuation for F.C.C.</i>	<i>Valuation by A. Todd</i>
Total Donibristle Houses	£6526:0:0	£3440:0:0	£5494:10:0
Total Kelty Houses	£1039:0:0	£ 795:0:0	£ 957:10:0
<i>Total</i>	£7565:0:0	£4235:0:0	£6452:0:0
Deduct	£1113:0:0		
Add		£2226:0:0	
<i>Final Totals</i>	<u>£6452:0:0</u>	<u>£6452:0:0</u>	<u>£6452:0:0</u>

(N.B. Houses on feu are not included in the above)

Source: SRO WRH CB 3/156

Table 4.4. Valuation of Houses at Kelty and Donibristle belonging to the Earl of Moray and taken over by the Fife Coal Company.

Statement given to Mr A Todd by DW Robertson

Kelty

Shields Old Farm Buildings: 12 houses converted from farm buildings	£500 : 0 : 0
Shields Farm House	£275 : 0 : 0
High Shields, 2 houses in poor state threatened with closure by Sanitary Inspector	£ 20 : 0 : 0
<i>Total</i>	<u>£795 : 0 : 0</u>

Donibristle

Heath Cottage		£290 : 0 : 0
Workshops Cottages		£ 26 : 0 : 0
Beech Cottage	2 houses	£250 : 0 : 0
Isa Cottage		£132 : 0 : 0
Frosty Mountains	4 houses	£ 80 : 0 : 0
Catherine Cottage		£ 25 : 0 : 0
Half Loaf		£ 6 : 10 : 0
Nabby's Row	5 houses	£ 70 : 10 : 0
Stans-ma-line	4 houses	£ 52 : 0 : 0
Earls Row	6 houses	£ 98 : 0 : 0
Old Schoolhouse	2 houses	£ 45 : 0 : 0
Den Cottages	2 houses	£ 30 : 0 : 0
School or Toll Row	7 houses	£132 : 0 : 0
Moray Cottages	13 houses	£325 : 0 : 0
Bucklyvie Cottage		£ 90 : 0 : 0
Ainslie Square	7 houses	£ 75 : 0 : 0
Toll Row	6 houses	£ 85 : 0 : 0
James Street	17 houses	£883 : 0 : 0
Moss Row	8 houses	£193 : 10 : 0
Marion Square	4 houses	£ 46 : 10 : 0
<i>Total</i>		<u>£2935 : 0 : 0</u>

Source: SRO WRH CB 3/156

Part II

Review and Introduction

The first part of the thesis provided the historical context of events in Fife between 1870 and 1930. In the second Part an attempt is made to explain, understand and interpret social relations in Fife during the same period. The third and final Part outlines the consequence of social change; the destruction, collapse and replacement of redundant social relations of production.

The changes in social relations of production that occurred between the 1870s and the 1930s took place against the background of the social and economic history of coal mining and working class housing in Scotland. The history of each was determined by human activity. Active agents of social change were the miners, the coal companies and the government. Each of these three agents had its own history which entwined with and influenced that of the other two. Therefore each had a particular role to play in the evolution of social relations in Fife mining communities. Before progressing to the next Part of the dissertation a review of the principal issues raised in Part I, and an indication of their importance, will be given.

In pre-industrial Scotland coal masters provided homes for their coal workers as a matter of necessity. The motivation in doing so was primarily economic; workers were required for the mines and they needed homes. In the absence of other agencies of provision coal masters had no alternative but to build workers houses. In time the motivation for the provision of workers' houses changed. Necessity continued to be a primary factor, although no longer paramount. Tradition and expectations gradually became important. What was common practice became customary

behaviour inherited by successive generations of coal-owners and colliers alike. Coal masters were expected to behave in a certain manner and tradition dictated that they did so.

Coal owners had high expectations of colliers. In exchange for a wage and a home they were expected to work and to respond to the regulation of their output according to market demand; while in exchange for welfare provision, they were expected not only to work but also to behave in a disciplined manner. Conduct and behaviour were believed to influence attitudes to work; thus a good worker was moral and productive. Since conduct and discipline were linked to workplace productivity and thereby profit, good behaviour quickly became defined as behaviour that led to the success of the industry. Alternatively, bad behaviour was anything that disrupted productivity and thereby the success of the firm.

Workplace discipline was an added dimension to the motivation behind coal company housing. Housing was one element of a welfare package provided to guarantee a stable, sedentary, disciplined and productive workforce. In Chapters 5 and 6 it will be demonstrated that by providing for workers' welfare, coal companies gained considerable influence over the lives of their workers. This influence was manifested in social control. In its benevolent form social control was implemented through the paternalism of nineteenth century coal-owners. In its malevolent form it surfaced as coercion. Paternalism and coercion were twin aspects of the same process of manipulation.

Coal companies continued to cater for the welfare needs of workers as long as welfare provision guaranteed output and profit. When the workforce ceased to be disciplined, and attempted to take control of its own

productivity and gain some power through collective action, provision of workers' housing began to decline. Building of workers' houses continued but, on a much reduced scale.

By the 1920s coal companies were still providing housing but, no longer for social reasons. Instead company housing had become a matter of political expediency. It shall be shown in Part III that in the inter war years poor quality housing was associated with poor management and used by the miners' union as an argument for nationalisation. In order to refute this argument coal companies erected new dwellings with modern up-to-date facilities.

It can be said therefore, that the motivation behind the provision of coal company housing evolved through three different stages; in the pre-industrial period the motivation was "economic"; in the heyday of the coal industry the motivation was primarily "social"; and during the years following the first World War when the industry had begun to decline, the motivation for providing housing was primarily "political".

During the historical period reviewed in the first part of the thesis coal-miners evolved from collier serfs to free and independent colliers. With the advent of capitalism they became employees of coal companies rather than bonded workers of coal masters. While employees they gradually organised themselves into trade unions. Meanwhile coal-owners started out as speculators and gradually became coal masters and then coal managers. As coal managers they managed both the industry and the workforce. The government, over the same period, evolved from having a mainly passive role in the affairs of the coal mining industry and housing to taking an active and dominant role in each.

All three agents of change interacted with each other. Collier serfs and independent colliers were dependent upon their coal masters. Later while employees they gradually came to depend upon each other and took collective action through their union. As a result of collective action they gained improvements in their workplace and home lives. And as a result of being given a certain amount of workplace responsibility during the First World War they gained a taste for control and agitated for the nationalisation of the industry.

Coal owners were all the while changing and adjusting their position relative to their workers. From an initial position of having almost total control over collier serfs they gradually entered into conflict with the miners' unions over wages, workplace conditions and housing. Later they also clashed with local government over housing, and with central government over the coal industry. The interests of the government generally coincided with those of private enterprise. Gradually, however, as a result of pressure from the miners' national union the government became interested in conditions in Scottish mining communities. The government legislated for improvements in workplace conditions and housing. They also legislated for control of the mining industry during the First World War and later for the nationalisation of the industry.

The aim of all three agents throughout was to either gain or maintain control of their situation. The struggle for control involved manipulation by all parties. The government professed to have the interests of both coal owners and miners uppermost. The coal owners allegedly had the best interests of the miners and the country at heart. In terms of social manipulation and the struggle for power, coal miners were less practiced than either coal-owners or the government. Their aim was to have a greater

say in their productivity and better home and work place conditions. In the attempt to realise these aims they failed to take full advantage of their own collective strength. It shall be shown in Part III that when in conflict with coal-owners the miners turned to the government for help, instead of relying upon their own power and ability to bring the industry to its knees. This gave the government the opportunity to gain control of the coal-mining industry. The government provided assistance to the miners but only so long as they did not endanger the interests of the government.

Part II of this thesis considers some of the issues raised above. Chapters 5-7 deal with social relations in Fife mining communities. Chapter 5 introduces the concepts of power and control, paternalism and deference, community and neighbourhood, and establishes operational definitions which are used in the remainder of the thesis. Chapter 6 looks at the principal manifestations of paternalism in Fife mining communities. Chapter 7 examines workers' housing from the tenants point of view. The chapter deals with allocation of housing and rent. It also introduces the gradual withdrawal of coal companies from the housing market. This withdrawal is the theme of the third and final part of the thesis.

Chapter 5

Power and control; paternalism, deference and social relations.

5.1. Introduction

According to Jackson and Smith the problem facing contemporary social geography is one of specifying a reasonable and just position between explanations of social life based on the voluntary actions of individuals, and explanations which must limit, or even determine, these actions. The quest is therefore to find a tenable middle ground between complete voluntarism and absolute determinism.¹ In order to find the middle ground;

“ geographers may justifiably and profitably indulge in eclecticism, provided that within any one philosophical framework their subject matter and analytical techniques are logically and consistently articulated”.²

In theoretical terms the dissertation is a combination of humanism, structuralism and Weberianism. The introduction to this chapter explains the position adopted, while the remaining sections identify and define the social concepts that underlie the interpretation.

The interpretative position taken is that the struggle between the agents of social change was for power. Therefore the agents of change were active,

¹ Jackson, P and Smith, S. J. (1984) *Exploring Social Geography*, Allen Unwin, London, p. 11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4

and their activities central and of primary importance. If their actions are to be explained then the actors must be central to both the interpretation and the context of the actions. Humanist philosophers accord people a central and active role and society a secondary part; "man (sic) is the determining factor and society is the dependent product of human interaction".³ The Humanist approach is that knowledge is obtained subjectively in a world of meanings created by individuals. The humanist methodology involves the investigation of these individual worlds. The purpose is to identify the true nature of human action. The coal-owners and coal-miners of Fife were central and active agents of change in social relations. Their struggle was for survival and in order to survive they had to actively either retain or gain power.

Agents of change and decision makers had to operate within specific social, political and economic contexts. For this reason the approach adopted derives from structuralism. "A structure consists of a system of relations which underlie and account for the sets of observable social relations and patterns of social consciousness."⁴ Structuralists attempt to penetrate beneath surface appearances to the structures which condition people's thoughts and actions⁵. However it is not the contention here that what occurred in Fife between 1870 and 1930 was merely the outcome of hidden political, social and economic forces. Such forces act not only as constraints upon human activity but also as opportunities. Hidden political, social and economic forces were the structures within which the action took place and

³ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴ Keat, R. and Urry, J. (1975) *Social Theory as Science*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p. 121.

⁵ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.* p. 11.

certainly influenced the decision makers, but did not necessarily determine their actions or the final outcome.

The underlying analytical stance relates most closely to Weber's theory of social stratification, based upon the distribution of power within society, as Weber's sociological approach encompasses the humanist and structuralist philosophies. For Weber, like Marx, conflict is endemic to capitalist society, which is seen as composed of competing interest groups in the struggle for survival. Weber identified three power groups within society; classes, status groups and parties. According to his social theory these power groups are the basis of three types of action; (1) communal; based upon "belonging together"; (2) associative; based upon the negotiation of interests; and (3) conflict; which arises whenever behaviour is "oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's will against the interest of others".⁶ Weber was not only concerned with the unequal distribution of power but also with the sociological characteristics of the "wielders" and "recipients" of power.⁷

5.2. Power and social relations.

"Power" has been defined by Lewis as the maximum force which one party could induce or exercise over another, less the maximum resistance that could be offered.⁸ For Simon "power" is the causation by which the behaviour of one or more persons alters the behaviour of another or

⁶ Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society*. Bedminster, New York, pps. 8-9.

⁷ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.* p. 108.

⁸ Lewis, K., (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*. Harper and Row, New York, p.336.

others.⁹ Weber defined power as the imposition of one's will upon the behaviour of others and identified it as an aspect of all social relations.¹⁰ He further believed that power rather than consensus holds society together. All of these definitions imply that power is essentially coercive and manipulative. Coercion however is not the only form of power. Society's power struggles need not involve overt conflict. Neither do modes of behaviour have to be enforced or prevented by manipulation. Power and authority are not exercised through institutional force alone; by police or armed forces as the instruments of State regulations and laws, but also by tradition and social obligation. Adults have power over children, strong people have power over weak people. It does not follow however that the weaker in these social relationships live in a state of constant fear or threat. The use of power is more subtle than this. It is exerted more through routine than through conscious provocation.¹¹

5.3. *Social control and socialisation.*

"The most powerful and direct influences over workers are exerted by employers and over citizens by the State and its apparatus of law and administration."¹²

The concept of social control has been borrowed by geographers and social historians from sociological theory. The basis of the concept was first established by E.A. Ross in 1901. He outlined two forms of control; self

⁹ Simon, H. A., (1957), *Models of Man*, Wiley, New York, pps. 77-78.

¹⁰ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Ibid.*

¹¹ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.* p. 121.

¹² Thompson, F. M. L., (1987) "Social Control in Modern Britain" *Recent Findings of Research in Economic and Social History*, 5, p. 4.

control by ethics and morals, and institutional control; laws and government regulations. Ross perceived social control as the result of a set of factors operating on society as follows;

"Such instruments of control as public opinion, suggestion, personal ideal, social religion, art and social valuation draw much of their strength from the primal moral feelings. They take their shape from sentiment rather than utility. They control men in many things which have little to do with the welfare of society regarded as a corporation. They are aimed to realise not merely a social order but what one might term a moral order. These we may call ethical. On the other hand, law, belief, ceremony, education and illusion need not spring from ethical feeling at all. They are frequently the means deliberately chosen in order to reach certain ends. They are likely to come under the control of the organised few and be used, whether for corporate benefit or for class benefit, as the tools of policy."¹³

While Ross distinguishes between overt control (education, belief, ceremony, law, etc.) and covert control (moral climate) the position adopted here is that there is not necessarily a distinction between the two. Instead of focusing upon the obvious means of social control, the imposition of laws and rules of social behaviour, or even the less overt but nonetheless powerful manifestations of control, religion and education, the emphasis here is upon the more subtle and covert manifestations of social control; paternalism, deference, and community, with socialisation as the means of ensuring their effectiveness.

Power is not wielded within society merely by one group of people controlling another through institutional and hierarchical control. Social control cannot be implemented unless it is supported by the majority of

¹³ Ross, E. A., (1929) *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order*. New York, p. 59.

citizens whose conduct is being regulated. Society regulates itself by means of socialisation. Socialisation is the means of ensuring the successful operation of social control. It is encouraged by socio-cultural institutions and organisations such as education, religion, art, leisure, and entertainment. Organised activity is enforced by socialisation.

Socialisation of behaviour has sometimes been separated from social control; the concept of "socialisation" being restricted to refer to the transmission of patterns of behaviour from one generation to the next.¹⁴

"It was liberated for use in describing and analysing the process by which groups with power and authority impose their value systems on the rest of society."¹⁵

Contrary to this position, it is the contention here that socialisation from within each class ensures the success of control by higher classes. Social control and socialisation are twin functions of the same process social manipulation. The subtle manipulation of individuals is demonstrated in socialisation which can both perpetuate the prevailing ethos of social control and promote an alternative ideology.

"We learn how to act by the very creation of our 'taken-for-granted' worlds, through the processes of socialisation that we experience; we absorb a way of life, and by conforming to it we reproduce it, and therefore create the socialising environment for the next generation."¹⁶

Individuals partake in the process, either wittingly or unwittingly. Members of society are raised to behave in a certain manner allegedly to the benefit of all.

¹⁴ Thompson, F. M. L., *Op. cit* , p. 4

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Johnston, R.J. (1985) "Places Matter", *Irish Geography*, Vol. 18, p 59

"Not even a family can exist as a social unit without some structure of accepted relationship between its members and some agreement on their understood roles, whether achieved by affection, calculation or compulsion. Indeed in some senses the family is the basic cell in the machinery of social control, the institution which socialises children into the manners and mores of the segment of society they inhabit."¹⁷

Socialisation is determined and controlled by those in control of the process. The process is designed to maintain specific social relations. Individuals who deviate from the acceptable mode of behaviour incur the wrath of society and are forced to conform through the implementation of institutional forms of control. Institutional controls are therefore the props that support social manipulation through socialisation. Both controllers and controlled are trained to their roles and are therefore often unaware of their contribution to the process of social control. By participating in socialisation, either consciously or unconsciously, each individual permits and actively supports control. It is important to recognise the role of socialisation as a buttress for social control in the study of inter-class relations.

Society is a complex organisation which functions as a hierarchy. The conventional three-fold division of society into upper, middle and lower class hides a complexity of sub-categories within each class. Within the working class for example there are skilled and unskilled labourers, and there are those with and those without employment. Among those without jobs there are individuals who are likely to gain employment and those for whatever reason will never again be employed. While embraced within the descriptive term "working-class," the individuals will not all share

¹⁷ Thompson, F. M. L., *Op cit.* pps. 1-2.

common life experiences or expectations.

Similar divisions into sub-levels exist within the middle and upper classes, according to status, wealth, education, employment and family background. Sub-divisions such as employment, unemployment and education can cut across class boundaries and permit movement within classes or from one class to another. The point is that the class "structure" is not static or even stable, and therefore the struggle for survival is always in a constant state of flux. Individuals are constantly moving within the structure either through their own volition or as a reaction to social or economic circumstances. Economic change in particular has a dramatic effect upon social structure, in that in periods of great economic change, social change occurs more rapidly. According to Weberian class theory, class positions are ultimately negotiable, and conflict, the struggle for power, is the process whereby these negotiations are worked out.¹⁸

The means of socialisation are ordained by society. Every member of society is in effect both controller and controlled. The amount of control we can exercise and the amount of control exercised upon us, depends upon the resources at our disposal. Each individual within the structure is equipped with some resources. These resources, be they natural, physical, mental or financial, provide opportunities and permit particular modes of behaviour towards others within the structure. They can also limit behaviour towards others and access to higher levels of society. Each individual is free to behave as he/she chooses only in so far as each has the resources to demand and maintain freedom of action. Personal resources represent the power available to each individual.

¹⁸ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.* p. 16.

Individuals with access to greater resources have greater control over their own destinies and the destinies of others. Those with few resources, in particular those with only their skilled or unskilled labour power to offer, have least control of their lives. The necessity to sell one's labour leads to dependence upon others; in effect upon those in control. Each class, status group and party within society will operate within the limits of the collective resources available to it. Actions are dictated by the limits of resources and each group will conduct itself to the best of its ability within the bounds of its members' expectations and limitations. The system succeeds so long as the supposed benefits are apparent to each member of society.

Society as a whole supports and reinforces the system by aiding and abetting control through socialisation. Individuals are nurtured in modes of behaviour calculated to guarantee the corporate good. Modes of social behaviour are inherited. They are learned from infancy through parents, teachers, peer group, community, religious and political leaders. Social conduct is designated as either right or wrong, conformist or deviant. Society cannot function without the inheritance of past social patterns of behaviour. Social conduct is pre-determined by one's location in the hierarchy of society and by the collective inherited history of one's class. The view postulated here is that social control, as enacted through socialisation, permeates every social interaction, no matter what position individuals have in the class structure. Members of society partake in a constant struggle for survival. In this struggle socialising agencies can change and reformulate themselves over time in accordance with changing circumstances. The use of resources at one's disposal and the exercise of power are fundamental to this struggle. Socialisation gives social

justification to social control while power and authority enforce it. Although Thompson argues that influence may be regarded as a form of social control, he finds it "more straightforward" to state that "employers manage and control workers, police control crowds and ministers lead congregations".¹⁹ However if the ultimate aim of each is to maintain a particular social order, and thereby an economic order, then influence and management have to function as mechanisms of power and social control. Therefore power and control cannot be isolated from each other.

It is contended throughout this thesis that social control cannot be separated from the exercise of power. To do so effectively reduces individuals to passive creatures or in the words of Jackson and Smith "mere puppets in the models of State theorists and social engineers".²⁰ On the contrary, each individual is an active agent in the struggle for survival and is limited in the struggle by the power at his/her disposal. Power and authority are the ultimate enforcers of social control.

5.4. Paternalism and deference.

If it is accepted that socialisation is the foundation of social control it can be concluded that the basic assumption of the concept of social control is that order is;

"maintained not only or even mainly by legal systems, police forces and prisons, but is expressed through a wide range of social institutions from religion to family life and including for example, leisure and recreation, education, charity and philanthropy, social work and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

²⁰ Jackson, P. and Smith, S. J. *Op. cit.* p. 8.

poor relief."²¹

This section outlines the roles of paternalism and deference in maintaining social control of workers. Social control need not necessarily be malevolent or overt. It can occur without the awareness of those who participate in its operation or those who lose or gain by it. Instead modes of conduct can be encouraged and suggested. Persuasion, encouragement and example are often potent means of controlling behaviour as they effectively rely upon manipulation to achieve the desired end.

A subtle form of social control evolved in nineteenth century industrial Britain. It was not based on force or coercion, or on the imposition of law, but rather on the encouragement of dependence and deference. Newby defines deference as "ideological hegemony"; the means by which "legitimacy accrues to the elite"²², while Joyce prefers to use the terms "cultural" or "social", rather than "ideological" hegemony.²³ The latter encourages the understanding of deference as a form of social interaction as well as an attitude of behaviour. As an "attitude", and a mode of social interaction, deference is difficult to prove or even demonstrate. It implies respect, but need not necessarily be reverential. Moreover, it concerns a desire and willingness to comply with the advice, motives and actions of another individual in a position of influence. It thus supports the motivation behind paternalism. Deference is centrally linked to the

²¹ Donajgrodzki, A. P., (ed.), (1977) *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, p. 9.

²² Newby, H., (1975) "The Deferential Dialectic" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17, no. 2, April . pps.155-8.

²³ Joyce, P., (1982) *Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Late Victorian England*. Methuen, London, p. 92.

legitimization of social hierarchy;

"Deference is the form of social interaction which occurs in situations involving the exercise of traditional authority."²⁴

In the nineteenth century coal-mining industry behaviour was modified through socialisation, deference and paternalism. Benevolent and covert control in the form of philanthropy and paternalism were means of controlling the working class. These latent forms of control operated in conjunction with the institutional controls of the State. Nineteenth century industrial deference and paternalism were potent means of implementing workplace discipline in Britain.

"Deference is the social relationship that converts power relations into moral ones and ensures the stability of hierarchy threatened by the less efficient, potentially unstable, coercive relationship."²⁵

Paternalistic employers, who limited the freedom of their workers by well-meant regulation, were the most successful in translating the dependence of their employees into deference.²⁶ The role of the family firm is of particular importance in this respect as its members were in the ideal position to use their social ties with their workers in the creation of a "mutually assenting relationship".²⁷ The success of paternalism in Fife is demonstrated in Chapter 6, where details are given of paternalistic and deferential social relations between coal-mining communities and coal companies.

²⁴ Newby, H., *Op. cit.*, p.146

²⁵ Joyce, P., *Op. cit.*, p.92

²⁶ Newby, H., *Op. cit.*, p.146.

²⁷ 21. Joyce, P., *Op. cit.*, p. xix.

Deference and paternalism go hand in hand and their implementation was assisted by the socialisation of the workforce. Each participant in social relations between employer and employee was trained in particular modes of behaviour. Each played a role according to group expectations.

"By providing the foundation that enabled power relations to become moral ones, dependence produced the situation in which deference could begin to work."²⁸

Paternalism was a very subtle form of social control. Its success was based upon the absence of manifest coercion, and the presence of covert persuasion. Moral rather than physical power was used. Persuasion proved more successful than force. Paternal employers manipulated their dependent employees by placing them under a social and moral obligation to their "masters". Dependence was often reaffirmed by religion and education, especially where these were also controlled by the firm.

The extent to which paternalism and deference existed in communities depended upon the history of the industries in question and on their geographical location. When industries were situated away from centres of population and sources of labour, the employers maintained a sedentary workforce by inducing them to remain through the provision of welfare amenities, such as houses, shops, churches, schools, and recreation facilities. The employers depended upon the workers for output and productivity, but the workforce was in turn dependent upon the employers for both work and social welfare. Work became a

. . . "source of pride and meaning. The commitment to work was reflected in the popular understanding of the

²⁸ Joyce, P., *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

employer as the provider of all."²⁹

Both sides became locked into a bond of social relations based upon reciprocity and inter-dependence. The feasibility and survival of these social relations of production depended on the delicate balance between the needs of the employers and employees. A great deal of give and take was involved and the balance was maintained as long as both sides were at least reasonable content with, or resigned to, their situation. Both parties had to be actively involved in maintaining and perpetuating the system.

"No form of class hegemony is reducible to mere social control. Rather than the unilateral imposition of cultural uniformity from above, such situations always involve mutual constraints, boundaries beyond which neither side can trespass if the social relationship in question is to remain viable" ³⁰

Workers were not necessarily docile and through collective action were sometimes in a position to change and improve their situation. There were nonetheless limits beyond which neither side could, or would stray. These were laid down according to tradition and custom.

"The sense of mutual constraint, bounds beyond which the superior as well as the inferior could not trespass, is of course integral to any proper understanding of hegemonic social relations". ³¹

The origins of the particular industries involved also played an important role in dictating social relations, as did the pre-industrial situation within the locality. The stability of the workforce; whether or not they were

²⁹ Joyce, P. *Op. cit* , p. 98.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. xvi.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 93.

sedentary or migratory, and the development of attachment to place and community all had effects on the evolution of deference and paternalism. Although place and spatial location do not determine behaviour they are nonetheless factors in their explanation.

The direct exercise of patronage by coal-owners was the overt manifestation of social control and deference was the response to this. The covert manifestation of social control was the deference and sense of loyalty encouraged by paternalism. Deference was not however maintained by paternalism alone. It was sustained by the self-control enforced by community identity.

Coal-mining communities were renowned for their strong sense of community identity and the support members gave each other, particularly in times of crisis. Strong communities only appear to arise when individuals need the support of others of their kind to survive. Once established communities are powerful means of either enforcing or destroying the given social order. The role of community and neighbourhood in enforcing deference and paternalism is therefore worthy of consideration.

5.5. Community and neighbourhood.

"Community did not make deference. But, deference is inexplicable without a sense of its imbrication in community."³²

A community is defined as an organised political, municipal or social body

³² Joyce, P. *Op. cit.* p. xxi-xxii.

and a group of people living in the same locality or sharing a common profession, religion or class. Community is the tangible reflection of common identity or purpose; whether as a result of work, education, socialisation, religion, common background, or home life.

"Community is both a social scientific concept, and a moral concept or metaphor for valued types of human association." ³³

The concept of community is used to describe forms of group organisation, be they political or social. It is also associated with the sharing of common experience, religion, profession, or even the same locality. A sense of community does not evolve from one of these alone but rather from a combination of all. It arises from place, common identity and organisation. A community generally requires a place or common goal and social organisation as the focus of group identity. The concept of community is many faceted, both tangible and intangible. A community is a group of people, an organised body, as well as what each perceives or desires it to be. It cannot be separated from a "sense of community"; that which individual members feel it to be rather than know it to be. Each participant contributes to the communal sense of unity as well as being part of it.

"Community is both empirically descriptive of a social structure and normatively toned. It refers both to the unit of society as it is and to the aspects of the unit that are valued if they exist, desired in their absence. Community is indivisible from human action, purposes and values. It expresses our vague yearnings for a commonality of desire, a communion with those around us, an extension of the bonds of kin and friend to all who share a common fate with us" ³⁴

³³ Bulmer, M., (ed.) (1978), *Mining and Social Change, Durham County in the Twentieth Century*. Croom Helm, London, p. 41.

³⁴ Minar, D. W. and Greer, Scott, (1969) *The Concept of Community. Readings with Interpretations*. Aldine, Chicago, p. ix.

Paternalism and deference were enforced by community, while community spirit was in turn enhanced by the social interactions arising from paternalism and deference. Paternalism was effective because of employers' "capacity for defining, and thus delimiting the social outlook of the workforce".³⁵ The strong sense of community that evolved in late nineteenth century factory towns was based upon the control of both work and home lives of company employees. Family run industrial enterprise took full advantage of the occupational homogeneity of their workforce, and encouraged a strong attachment to workplace and locality.

A sense of community, of common lot and purpose, was particularly strong where the lives of all workers were centred on one particular source of employment. Factory towns; the paternalistic provision of houses, shops, schools, churches and hospitals, facilitated the development of a separate identity. The family firm took full advantage of the separate identity of their employees and the skilled artisan ethos that distinguished industrial workers from labourers. The notion of an extended family working to the same end was exploited, with owners and masters in the parental role and workers the obedient and deferential children. It shall be seen in Chapter 6 that coal managers sometimes took on the mantle of institutional control by acting as the local disciplinarian.

Family firms worked as agents of community formation. That is not to say that community identity would not have arisen without family run firms or factory towns. Nevertheless the paternalism and resultant deference which pervaded industrial towns enhanced community identity. In large

³⁵ Joyce, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

scale industrial enterprises such as coal-mining, ship building, the iron and steel and textile industries, the skilled nature and centralised location of the industries acted as agents of community formation. For Joyce work was an agent of community formation rather than of class domination.³⁶ It is perhaps ironic that the social isolation of industrial workers and the maintenance of largely single classed communities ultimately facilitated the destruction of deferential and paternalistic social relations. Coal miners unions in particular exploited the community identity that existed in company towns.

"Phrases such as 'isolated mass', 'separatist group' and 'occupational community' have been used in attempts to systematise the complex ties which bound miners together in their work, their homes and their communities, which stimulated both a deep loyalty to each other and endemic conflict between them and their employers."³⁷

What Hickey describes as the "informal ties" that developed between miners resulted from frequent social contact at work and at home. Such close community ties enabled miners and their families to cope with the harsh conditions of their lives and also acted as a foundation for trade union solidarity. A community which initially supported the hegemony of the employer, could, over time, adopt trade unionism. Once radical ideas gained a foothold in close-knit communities, they quickly spread and gained support. Members of communities adopted whatever means or ideas were available to facilitate their own defence and survival.

Neighbourhoods and neighbourly behaviour were tangible reflections of

³⁶ Joyce, P. *Op. cit.* p. xxi.

³⁷ Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany. The Miners of the Ruhr*. Clarendon, Oxford, p. 5.

community and the sense of community identity. The terms "community" and "neighbourhood" are used interchangeably in the literature of social science research. A "neighbourhood" has been defined as the "physical proximity to a given subject of attention and the intimacy of association among people living in close proximity to one another", and also as "a distinct territorial group; distinct by virtue of the specific physical characteristics of the area and the specific social characteristics of the inhabitants".³⁸ Neighbourhoods have distinct territorial and physical dimensions, as well as specific social characteristics. A neighbourhood consists of a defined terrain inhabited by neighbours. The extent of the neighbourhood is defined by the spatial distribution of the households or communities concerned.

"Neighbours" are simply people who inhabit neighbourhoods. They live close to one another as "nigh dwellers", and this proximity gives rise to close social relationships.³⁹ Being a neighbour is therefore a matter of location. For Abrams, neighbourly relations, neighbourliness, or neighbouring, and the moral attitudes that sustain the concept of "neighbourly behaviour", developed in the past in situations where people helped each other out of necessity. Without the code of neighbourly conduct survival would have proved difficult. Neighbouring can then be seen as (1) a result of economic constraint; and (2) a response of economic insecurity.⁴⁰ Co-operative action of any kind can be viewed as a form of

³⁸ Hawley, A., (ed.) (1968), *Roderick D. Mackenzie on Human Ecology*, University of Chicago, p.73.

³⁹ Glass, R., (1948) *The Social Background of a Plan*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Abrams, P., in Bulmer, M., (1986) *Neighbours. The Work of Philip Abrams*. Cambridge University Press, p. 18.

desperation. Communal action and support is the last result in the effort to change circumstances; it arises in situations of little or no alternative.

Neighbouring or a sense of community spirit can be positive (respectful of privacy, altruistic) or negative and intrusive (social surveillance). It can be active (frequent, ever present, consistent) or latent (surfacing only in time of necessity, trouble or disaster). The strength of neighbouring is associated with collective deprivation, class consciousness, and powerful or extensive kinship attachment.⁴¹

The solidarity that arises from economic insecurity, constraint, collective deprivation, a sense of common grievance and common purpose, was for Durkheim the most interesting aspect of social relations.⁴² Harvey has emphasised the importance of "reciprocity"; the "give and take" that stems from "a common fate and common life chances".⁴³ "Reciprocity" is related to neighbourliness and the establishment of close knit communities through the bonds of mutual obligation. Neighbouring leads to a sense of identification with a particular neighbourhood and through that identity a sense of obligation to a particular community. The more established the community is, the stronger these ties become. The more intense the sense of community the more difficult it is for newcomers to gain acceptance and a place in the neighbouring network. The phenomenon of suspicion of outsiders is well attested for coal-mining communities.⁴⁴ The fear of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pps. 8-9.

⁴² Durkheim, E., (1893, 1933), *The Division of Labour in Society*, Free Press, New York.

⁴³ Harvey, D., (1973) *Social Justice and the City*, Arnold, London, pps. 281-282.

⁴⁴ Frankenberg, R., (1966) *Communities in Britain, Social Life in Town and*

outside and suspicion of "strangers" enforced social isolation and communal insecurity. Community is a response to a common sense of insecurity and powerlessness.

Neighbouring enforced social cohesion. As an extension of the negative aspects of this (gossip, casual surveillance) neighbouring enforces socialisation and social control.⁴⁵ Standards and conventions, norms of behaviour, etc. are not imposed only from above, but also from within the community, through peer pressure.

"If everyone knew everyone else then there was a fair possibility that they knew something about everyone else's business; close knit highly integrated collectives can exercise powerful social control over their members as well as being highly integrated."⁴⁶

Neighbouring modified social behaviour of community members by encouraging conformity. Actions were dictated by permitted norms established from within the community itself.

Country, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 116

⁴⁵ Litwak, E. and Szelenyi, I., 1969, "Primary Group Structures and their Functions: Kin, Neighbours and Friends", *American Sociological Review*, 34, pps. 465-81.

⁴⁶ Bulmer, M., *op.cit.*, p. 43-44.

5.6. Conclusion.

The question of how solidarity, arising from residential relationships influences other social relationships, (e.g. wider community and workplace relations), and through these social integration, is central to the analysis of social relations within coal-mining communities. Where houses and tenants are tied to a specific source of employment, work based and home based social relations are inseparable. In the words of Frankenberg " social relations in the pit spread outwards into social relations in the homes and streets".⁴⁷ Study of neighbourhoods, neighbouring and communities involves assessing the relationship of the world of the neighbourhood with larger spheres of social networks in which the same individuals are involved. The extent of the neighbouring and thereby the socialisation and control, can to a certain degree be explained by the physical characteristics of the neighbourhood. This is not to say that architecture and street layout determine social relations. Nevertheless, proximity of houses and especially of front doors, and communal shared facilities, can facilitate close neighbourly relations. Moreover, a strong sense of community will develop if neighbourhood inhabitants share the same employment, religion, social class and recreational facilities. It will also develop where people share the same insecurities, threats, struggle, aims and aspirations.

Coal owners used patronage as a means of maintaining control over their workers. They also gained more power through the exercise of patronage. The more they were seen to give the more they received in return. Paternalism thrived, and was at its most successful in stable economic environments.⁴⁸ It worked so long as the return was guaranteed for both

⁴⁷ Frankenberg, R., *Op. cit.* pps. 116-117, with reference to Ashton Coal-mining Community, "The Town that is a Village", pps. 113-139.

⁴⁸ Joyce, P., *Op. cit.* p.93.

sides and the benefits of continuing were self evident. Deference began to collapse once competition placed greater pressure on productivity and wages. The unstable economic climate of the second half of the nineteenth century whittled away the close social relations of paternalistic enterprises. Within specific localities however paternalism and deference remained important well into the twentieth century. Paternalism and deference are linked to social control through socialisation. A strong sense of community and class cohesion enhanced each.

In homogeneous industrial enterprises a sense of common identity and shared lifestyle enforced the development of communities. A strong sense of community spirit in turn reinforced deference and paternalistic social control. Community socialisation supported deferential and paternalistic social relations so long as communities remained free from outside influences. Paternalism was successful in restricting and modifying the behaviour of workers only so long as the "controlled" perceived that they benefited under the system.

The concepts of paternalism, deference and community, are used throughout the remainder of Part II to illustrate social relations in Fife mining communities. Chapter 6 explains how paternalism and deference evolved in Fife and illustrates their success in dictating behaviour maintaining order. Chapter 7 continues these themes but also introduces the vulnerable and weak aspects of the relationship between coal-owners and colliers. In Part III the extent to which paternalism and deference were based upon power relations will become clear.

Chapter 6

Social relations in Fife mining communities

6.1. Introduction

As outlined in the Introduction to the thesis, the majority of Fife's coal company houses were erected by the Fife Coal Company, the Wemyss Coal Company and the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company. These Fife coal-owners owned their workers' houses and controlled the provision and allocation of the properties. They were both employers and landlords. Thus miners were to a great extent limited in choice and action by this link between their work and home lives. Ownership of workers' houses and control of the process of housing were means of controlling and disciplining the workforce. Through the provision of both homes and jobs coalowners gained considerable power over their employees; this power became both a great responsibility and a weapon.

Economic necessity was the ultimate motivation behind the provision of workers' housing. Houses were originally erected as a means of attracting and maintaining the workforce necessary to keep the mines in production. Despite the obvious economic function of company housing the close ties that evolved from provision of housing and social amenities encouraged close community and workplace relations. The practice of providing housing led to the tradition whereby it was assumed, by all involved, that the provision would take place. Company provision of housing was taken for granted by coal companies, miners and the government alike. Coal

companies were under an obligation to provide houses for their workers as part of a welfare "package" introduced in pre-industrial times. This obligation was derived from necessity but sustained by custom. The reciprocal needs of the coal companies and workers led to mutual dependence. While a miner was dependent upon the coal master for house and home, the coal owner was equally dependent upon the miner for the skills of his trade. In exchange for labour, coal masters catered for their workers' welfare needs. This mixture of necessity, dependence and obligation gradually evolved towards paternalism and deference. Whether the coal master was loved or hated each miner had a personal relationship with him.

The provision of coal company housing should be viewed as a primary element of work place relations. It was a principal part of the package of welfare amenities provided by coal companies to guarantee a workforce and thus was central to work relations. The work place relations, prevalent in Fife mining communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were derived from pre-industrial relations of production. The principal factors that influenced relations between workers and owners were collier serfdom, family employment, the strong sense of community, deference and paternalism.

This chapter provides an overview of social relations of production in Fife mining communities during the period in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. Using operational definitions established in Chapter 5, the chapter attempts to explain the relationship between welfare, dependence and paternalism and deference. The function of the chapter is to describe how paternalism and deference evolved in Fife. Section 6.2. considers community strength and 6.3 deals with cycles of power and

powerlessness between 1870 and 1930. Section 6.4. explores in detail the manifestations of paternalism and deference in Fife. Here welfare provision by coal companies, in addition to housing, is described. The chapter is a bridge to Chapter 7 where evidence of the dissipation of paternalism and deference, is first introduced.

6.2. Community strength.

Because of the nature of their work and the location of early mines Scottish colliers lived in tight, close knit, small and isolated communities. They were born, lived, worked, married and died in self contained villages usually at a distance from other communities and towns. They were inward looking and viewed with suspicion by other labourers. As an isolated workforce they developed over the two centuries of bondage a form of control of their own labour and work practice within the bounds of bondage. Within the bondage system coal miners built for themselves a form of control and power based upon close community ties and a reciprocal relationship of obligation between themselves and coal masters.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Scottish coal-mining industry was dominated by so called "independent colliers" who perpetuate the ethos of the skilled craftsman. Bonded miners and independent colliers controlled their own labour through regulation of work practices and training. The labour of every member of a family was vital to the success of the industry. Until the 1842 Mines Act wives and children acted as coalbearers, putters and getters to their coal hewing husbands and fathers.¹ Indeed wives and children were usually listed in colliery inventories as in the case of Fordell

¹ 1842 Mines Act, to Prohibit the Employment of Women and Girls in Mines and Collieries etc. 5 & 6 Vict. c. 99.

in Fife in the early nineteenth century (see Chapter 1, Section 1.5.1). The Childrens Employment Commission appointed in 1840 collected evidence on conditions in nineteenth century coalmines. The evidence shows that children from the age of seven years were working upwards of twelve hours a day. The reports from the west of Scotland however show that women and children were not generally employed underground in the collieries there.² In the east of Scotland; the Lothians, Stirlingshire, Fife and Clackmannan, the sub-commissioners for the enquiry recorded 429 interviews mainly with children, and investigated over 100 collieries. Nearly a quarter of the workforce, 2256 out of 9092 were children under thirteen years.³ The exact reasons for such a high level of child labour in east Scotland are uncertain, but can possibly be accounted for by the long history of the industry there and the tradition of family labour.

Every member of the community invested their labour in the mine and wages earned were family wages. Children were trained by their parents in the skills needed to work underground. Sons were apprenticed to their fathers and became accomplished at all the processes involved in cutting coal and removing it from the coal face to the pit bottom. Daughters became coal bearers, putters and getters alongside their mothers. They carried the hewn coal to the pit bottom in creels on their backs or they dragged and pulled filled hutches along wooden roadways and up ladders.

Miners viewed themselves as skilled craftsmen rather than labourers. Each

² "Nowhere in the west of Scotland . . . do they bear out coals on their backs as . . . is the case in Fifeshire and the Lothians" in Arnot, R. P., (1955) *A History of the Scottish Miner from the Earliest Times*, George Allen and Unwin, London, p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

young miner went through years of apprenticeship to the trade in a similar manner to mediaeval artisan guilds. At particular stages in his apprenticeship a boy's earnings increased depending on whether his work was regarded as that of a quarter, half or whole man. At 18 years an apprentice was felt to have reached maturity and became a qualified coal hewer.⁴ He was then entitled to work his own section of the coal face and to employ his own helpers. He was also then in a position to marry. When a young miner married it was rarely to someone from outside the community.

It was to the advantage of a young collier to marry and raise a family not only because a single collier had to spend some of his earnings on hiring bearers and getters, but also because free housing was usually allocated to married men. In some instances single coal hewars were discriminated against by having to pay rent for a company house. At Grange colliery for example, in the 1790s single men paid 3d. per week for a company house while married colliers had rent free homes.⁵ This policy in housing allocation both encouraged family life and guaranteed a labour supply.

The fact that miners viewed their work as a craft requiring rigour and dedication instilled a sense of mystique which served to heighten the suspicion of workers outside the mines. Apprenticeship was a logical progression from the state of bondage and was a means of dealing with living and working conditions. By insisting upon apprenticeship and

⁴ Bremner, D.,(1969) *The Industries of Scotland. Their Rise, Progress and Present Condition [1869]* (Reprint of 1869 edition) David and Charles, Newton Abbot, p. 22.

⁵ Flinn, M.W., (1984) *History of the British Coal Industry, Vol. 2, 1700-1830; The Industrial Revolution*, Clarendon, Oxford, pps. 429, 431, 432.

initiation into the trade, miners also monopolised their own productivity and the number of labourers in the industry. These work practices coupled with the danger of the job cemented close personal ties which in turn fed back into the closely knit community. Free miners often worked in teams headed by an oversman, who was one of their number. The oversman reported to the coal master and negotiated the price and amount of coal produced by the group.

The direct result of these relations of production was that the mining community reproduced itself and the coal trade was guaranteed a relatively stable and sedentary workforce. Indeed in comparison to other labourers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they were well off. They had good wages while working (although never paid when not producing and coal trade was slack) and they were guaranteed a house with the job.⁶ The extent to which the miners were satisfied with this is not known as the only surviving documentation is written from the coal masters' point of view. The fact that the system prevailed for two centuries and was ended by the coal masters, anxious to attract more labourers to an expanding industry, may be an indication of the system's success in terms of labour relations.

6.3. Cycles of power and powerlessness.

All economic relationships are also social relationships. In the employer-worker relationship the employee only had his/her skills and labour power to offer in exchange for a living wage. The lower the value of the labour and

⁶ In the 1760s the average wage of a Scottish coal hewer was 2/6 per day, while that of a labourer was between 6d. and 8d. a day; see Hamilton, H (1963) *An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon, Oxford, p. 369.

the less skill the workers possessed the greater the power over them. Holding people in organised activity kept them under control.⁷ Work and the necessity to earn a living were potent instruments of social control. With industrialisation of the late eighteenth century workers and skilled labourers gradually lost control of their own output in favour of entrepreneurial industrialists.

The only resource a worker had was his/her labour and the wage that that labour could command. This in turn was dependent upon the value of labour. The value of labour was determined by those in power. There was no such thing as intrinsic worth or intrinsic value. The value of something was only that which people were willing to pay for it. Labour was valued and expensive when it was needed for a purpose, usually to maintain productivity and thereby profits. The capitalist extracted labour power (value) and determined workers' wages. Some skills were more valuable than other and commanded greater prices. For example the power of the miners' union was at its highest when society needed miners to maintain the industry's productivity and this was when they made greatest headway in terms of wages and conditions of employment. In this sense it could be argued that unions were manipulated by both the government and industry, so long as they were useful.

Scottish miners experienced stages of power and powerlessness between the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In the early years of bondage they were powerless and entirely under the control of coal masters. Gradually throughout the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century they gathered strength and gained some control of the workplace within the

⁷ Thompson, F.M.L., (1987) "Social Control in Modern Britain", *Recent Findings of Research in Economic and Social History*, 5, p. 4.

limits of bondage. This they consolidated in the early years of emancipation through the independent colliers. With the introduction of outside labour and intensive mining methods in the mid- and second half of the nineteenth century, their position gradually weakened. They did not regain strength until the trade union movement gathered momentum.

During these cycles of power and powerlessness each side attempted to gain the upper hand by subtle means of manipulation and coercion. The sense of group cohesion and identity that evolved through work practices was reinforced by paternalism and deference. Deference evolved from the necessity of coalowners to provide for the welfare of the miners and the dependence of the colliers and their families upon coalmasters for both a home and work. The paternalism of the family firm encouraged dependence and a strong sense of community and workplace identity. Interdistrict rivalry and competition between coal companies and coal districts introduced in Chapter 2, supported close social relations between miners and owners. Fostering paternalism and reciprocal feelings of deference was a means of maintaining social control over a stable and docile workforce.

There is little doubt that many coal masters were genuinely paternalistic towards their workers and regarded their power as a responsibility rather than a weapon. Nonetheless the ultimate aim was to sustain a standard of coal production and thereby to maintain productivity through workplace discipline. When the influence of deference began to decline in the late nineteenth century more overt forms of control came to the fore. Welfare amenities became a means of effecting workplace discipline. The threat of wage reduction and eviction from company housing were recurring themes in labour negotiation from the 1890s to the 1920s.

As already noted in Chapter 1 the anticipated influx of labourers into the industry following collier emancipation in 1799 did not take place. Hence the workforce was not large enough to serve an expanding and developing coal industry and inevitably free labour was hired on the open market. These were often unemployed or immigrant workers who had little choice in finding employment. The control miners had over their productivity was gradually whittled away by the market forces of free trade and waged labour. So too were the close ties between the coal owners and colliers. With the introduction of free labour and capitalist relations of production coal owners began to regulate productivity and wages. Coal masters became managers and colliers became sub-contractors. As abundant cheap labour was available on the open market the skills of traditional miners were gradually devalued.

While relations of production slowly changed in Scottish coalmines throughout the nineteenth century residual elements of pre-industrial social relations survived. Deep rooted modes of behaviour and traditions that evolved over the previous two centuries were difficult to erode and relinquish. Local loyalties and the sense of mutual obligation lasted in many areas until the decline of the industry in post World War I Britain. Indeed paternalism and deference fostered through pre-industrial relations of production remained largely intact until the large scale mechanisation of the industry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

As outlined in Chapter 2, (Section 2.4.) the miners' union took several decades to gain a foothold throughout Scotland and did not emerge as a powerful entity until the end of the nineteenth century. Trade unionism and coal company paternalism were the antithesis of each other. Coal

company control of housing and the bond between individual workers, their homes and their employers, were threats to trade union organisation.

Trade unionists wished to break the ties of paternalism and deference as a means of effecting working class solidarity and communal action. They sought greater control over national productivity, wages and living standards. They attempted to gain greater control through national collective bargaining, negotiation with local and national government and through industrial action. Trade union unity and collective bargaining worked in opposition to local loyalties. The ultimate struggle was for control over workforce loyalty. Moreover, had it not been for the effects of national economic and political events in the pre-world war one period, the close social relations of production that evolved in Fife from pre-industrial times, may have persisted even longer.

Scottish miners were at the peak of their strength before, during and immediatly after the first World War. This period coincided with (1) state control of the industry during the war, (2) greater autonomy for the workforce, (3) rent strikes, (4) demands for improvements in housing conditions, (5) investigations into the management of the coal industry and (6) agitation for nationalisation. The latter was finally achieved in 1949 at a time when the industry had entered a decline. So too the fortunes of the miners. It will be argued in Chapters 8-10 that in fighting the control of coal companies Scottish miners effectively relinquished what power they had to the State.

By the inter-war years coal companies, as a result of pressure on funds and economic competition, no longer wished to be responsible for the social welfare of their employees. The return in terms of productivity and

workplace discipline and loyalty by then no longer warranted expenditure of company funds. Social relations of production, paternalism and deference, had been replaced by market relations of production, discipline and control.

6.4. Paternalism and deference in Fife mining communities.

This section of the chapter describes welfare provision for miners and introduces the contrasts and similarities between old and new coal companies. Provision of housing was an important element of welfare provision, but not the only one. In providing workers' houses Fife coalowners were distinctive in that both old and new companies continued to build workers' houses into the twentieth century. While details of housing provision have already been given in the Introduction, (with more to follow in Chapter 10) and legal arrangements, whereby coal companies provided houses, were explained in Chapter 4, this section introduces other types of welfare provision in Fife mining communities.

The mid-nineteenth century is seen by most social and economic historians as the classic period of industrial deference and paternalism.⁸ In Fife's coal-

⁸ Benson, J., (1980) *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History*. Gill & Macmillan, London; Burgess, K., (1975) *The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience*. Croom Helm, London; Colls, R., (1987) *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield. Work Culture and Protest, 1790-1850*. Manchester University Press; Fitzgerald, R., (1988) *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare 1846-1939*. Croom Helm, London; Joyce, P., (1975) The Factory politics of Lancashire in the late Nineteenth Century. *Historical Journal* 18, 3, pps. 525-53.; (1982) *Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Late Victorian England*. Methuen, London.; (ed.) (1987) *The Historical Meaning of Work*. CUP, Cambridge.

mining communities deference and paternalism remained strong into the twentieth century. One of the possible reasons for its survival was that coal extraction there had a history dating back to medieval times and the early mining companies were also the landed aristocracy. The place itself, its location and relative isolation, while not determining close social relations of production, assisted in their development and survival. The close ties that developed from mutual dependence in the pre-industrial period lingered in Fife longer than elsewhere, despite increasing pressure and economic competition from the 1870s onwards. Their survival was largely due to the isolated physical location of Fife, particular historical developments within the Scottish coal-mining industry and the role of long established family firms.

Company organisation was of great importance to the development of deference and paternalism. Long established family firms were run by the local landed aristocracy. Company profits reverted to the family and their estates. Sharing the bounty of the company's output with the miners in the form of housing and social amenities were means of reinvesting profits in their land and locality. It also justified the social position of the coal-owners within the community. Late nineteenth century, large scale and highly industrialised foundations, had no such ties with the land or locality. In these cases the profits went to shareholders in the form of dividends on their investment. These companies greatest concern was to satisfy the shareholders rather than company employees.

6.4.1. *Henderson of Fordell.*

"Like the miners the colliery proprietors were also members of generations of one family whom the miners served with unbroken devotion."⁹

These words were written by a local historian in his book on the mining village of Fordell in south west Fife, and encapsulate the feelings of the villagers toward the coal owners in the early twentieth century. There was in the village, a long history of integration between the miners and the Henderson family who owned the mines. The local mines were worked by the Henderson family from the eighteenth century. The family were reputed to have taken a "thoroughly practical interest in all that concerned the welfare of the miners". In 1813 the Fordell coal company became the property of the Countess and Earl of Buckinghamshire through inheritance, and although Fordell Castle was not their primary residence they visited there regularly.

The Hendersons of Fordell owned the Fordell Coal Company which erected houses for its workers from the late eighteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth century the company kept careful records of their employees and houses. These records survive for the period 1814-1894 and were considered in Chapter 1 (Section 1.5.1.). In addition to houses the company also employed a doctor for the miners. In 1859 the doctor was in attendance at the mine three days a week, and every day for cases of severe injury. If an operation requiring assistance was needed he provided this free of charge unless the procedure involved removal of the patient to Edinburgh.¹⁰

⁹ Holman, R. (1952) *Behind the Diamond Panes: The Story of a Fife Mining Community*, Cowdenbeath, p. 119.

¹⁰ SRO GRH GD 172/898: Letter dated 7 January 1859 from Dr. G.L. White concerning medical attendance on Fordell colliers.

Widows of miners, the old and infirm were housed free of rent and in the early days were given supplies of meal each week. (see Chapter 1 for details).¹¹

Prior to the granting of the widows' pension the Fordell coal company allowed widows to use one room of their homes as a sweet shop. There they sold sweets, rock, small kitchen articles, pins, thread, penny bottles of vinegar and penny packets of notepaper.¹² The company often provided the widows with a large mangle so they could take in washing. The colliery manager was also reputedly good to old miners who were usually given work at the surface, maintaining the railways, or odd jobs at the pithead or colliery workshop.

Paternalism at Fordell involved more than the provision of homes and looking after the old and unemployed. The Laird also catered for the miners' recreational needs. As well as the workers' houses the company also erected a colliery school and reading room at the village. Funds were donated to the village brass band, and band members were given free use of a hall for meetings and practices. Gifts and prizes were donated to the village flower show and Lady Henderson gave a watch to each pupil of Fordell school who reached the 6th. standard. She was also patron of the village reading club and made an annual donation of £5.¹³ Fordell was also one of the first villages in west Fife to have a bowling green laid out by the

¹¹ SRO GRH GD 172/689: List dated 26 September 1853 of the population and of the houses about Fordell colliery.

¹² Holman, R., *Op. cit.* p. 90.

¹³ SRO GRH GD172/941: Letter dated 18 January 1884 from John King, Secretary of the Fordell Reading Club, with a statement on income and expenditure for the colliery Reading Room and Library.

coal company.¹⁴

In return, the residents of Fordell were deferential and loyal. For example it is said that there was little or no need for police presence at Fordell as the colliery manager acted as village disciplinarian.¹⁵ When children misbehaved their mothers brought them to the manager's office for a talking to. Since all of the village boys were miners' sons it was in the interest of the colliery manager to see to their good behaviour. The boys were later subject to the authority of the manager in their working lives.

In July of each year a parade was held in the village, allegedly to commemorate collier emancipation. The Henderson were reputed to have played a prominent role in ending collier bondage and granted their colliers freedom a year before the Act of 1775 obliged coal masters to do so.¹⁶ The annual parade and holiday were the highlight of the villagers' year. The parade was led by the village brass band and marched to Fordell castle where the Laird provided the old miners with "spiritual" refreshments and Lady Henderson presented each of the pit lassies with a pound of sweets.¹⁷ The villagers were then invited to inspect the castle gardens. The parade next moved on to Anson hill, the home of the colliery manager. There the villagers received more greetings and refreshments. The whole event was celebrated in local song and folklore;

"Then we went to Anson Hill,

¹⁴ Holman, R., Op. cit. pps. 44, 55, 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The barrels were there wi' five guinea ale,
 And the ravens got up to spill,
 On the 20th. day of July.

Hurray, Hurray, for the Fordell Laird,
 Long in Fordell may he be spared,
 And the mines bounty ever shared,
 On the 20th. day of July."¹⁸

Deference was shown by Fordell employees in the respect they gave their employers and their pride in the Laird and his Lady. Fordell's miners were even represented at the funerals of the Laird and Lady Henderson. At the burial of Lady Henderson, in keeping with her final wishes, eighteen colliers were present to act as pallbearers.¹⁹

" . . . it was the kindly consideration of the Henderson family that brought them nearer to the hearts of the villagers . . . prizes for the gardens, for the flower show, for the upkeep of the brass band and the reading room, merit prizes for the school children, and small gifts for the needy, poor and sick."²⁰

6.4.2. *Wemyss' of Wemyss.*

The Wemyss family and coal company provide another example of long standing paternalism and deference between coal owner and colliers. The family was known for paternalism well into the twentieth century. They resided in the castle at East Wemyss (known locally as "the Barony") and from there conducted all estate business: the fact that they were not absentee landlords facilitated close association with the local population. This close

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pps. 103, 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

association with, and attachment to, the locality led to strong ties of mutual obligation between the residents of the castle and estate tenants.

Evidence of Wemyss paternalism survives in the area surrounding the castle itself, in the form of workers' houses of exceptionally high standard at East and West Wemyss, the Coaltown of Wemyss and Methil (see the thesis Introduction). Ownership of the land was extremely important in this regard, as it permitted the erection of buildings without the burden of feu duties payable to the landed proprietor. As with the Hendersons of Fordell, the Wemyss family not only provided their workers with homes, but also provided for the health, education and recreation of their employees.

Wemyss have been continuously resident in Fife since the thirteenth century and are said to have one of the longest and purest pedigrees in Scotland. They trace their descent from Macduff and Sir John of Methil and Wemyss (Muckle John of the caves) who assumed the family name of Wemyss. King James IV of Scotland created the Barony of East Wemyss in 1508 from the manor and lands of East Wemyss, and the lands of Lochore. In 1630 the castle of Macduff and lands were purchased by Sir John, first Earl of Wemyss who reunited the Wemyss estate following its division for inheritance reasons in the fourteenth century. David, second Earl of Wemyss resided in Wemyss castle and in 1651 East and West Wemyss were united to become the Barony of Wemyss.

The Wemyss family engaged in mining and salt manufacture at Wemyss from the fifteenth century onwards. In the seventeenth century Earl David, the second Laird of Wemyss, was well known for his coalmines and was reputed to be the premier mining engineer in the country. The population of the barony engaged in fishing, weaving, coal-mining and the

manufacture of salt. Fishing communities were located along the coast and weaving and mining communities inland.

Paternalism and deference evolved at Wemyss for several reasons. Firstly, the Wemyss family resided at Wemyss castle, East Wemyss, and this became the focal point of the local community. Secondly, the family developed the coal-mining industry and thereby provided employment for residents of the barony. Thirdly, because they had title to the land they were in a position to erect houses for their workers, in particular for the coal miners needed to work the expanding number of coal mines. Fourthly, the family fostered and embraced the traditions of pre-industrial social relations of production. Wemyss paternalism was enacted through catering for the welfare needs of the estate workers and industrial employees, and in particular through the provision of houses for the coal-miners and weavers.

The Wemyss family employed an architect in the 1880s who became responsible for the design of miners' houses in the locality, in particular those at East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss and Methil. Alexander Todd was not only commissioned to design workers houses, but also company schoolhouses. Prior to his arrival the company had provided schools for the local children at West Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss and Methilhill. These were generally two single storey houses joined to create classrooms, with the schoolmaster's house next door. Todd designed schools founded by the Laird, Randolph Wemyss, at West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Denbeath, Aberhill, Methil and Inner Leven; all built according to the same design between 1890 and 1900. The Wemyss family also erected the old Buckhaven secondary school, the Dorothy primary school founded in



Plate 9 Randolph Wemyss Memorial Hospital, Wellesley Road, Methil. Built in 1909.



Plate 10 Wemyss School of Needlecraft.

1896, and provided reading rooms in all the local villages.²¹

Further evidence of paternalism lies in the company's concern for the welfare of those workers outside the mainstream workforce. These included women, children, the old, retired, sick and widowed. Widows were generally housed either free or with a nominal rent. (see Chapter 7 for details on the treatment of widows). They were also given free fire coal. The sick were permitted to build up arrears of rent while out of work and to repay in gradual instalments when they regained employment. The company tolerated very high levels of arrears, amounting in some cases to several years rent (see chapter 7).

The coal company erected not only houses, schools and reading rooms but also provided the community with health and recreation facilities. The Randolph Wemyss memorial hospital was built in baronial style at Wellesley road Methil in 1909 in memory of the Laird who died in 1908. [Plate 9] Captain Michael Wemyss who took over the business from his late father built two blocks of houses at East Wemyss as homes for retired miners after the First World War. Each of the blocks contains a plaque with a Latin inscription; that on the building nearest the church reads "Nisi Dominus Trusti" (Put your Trust in the Lord) and the other ; "Deus Adest Laborantibus" (God Helps Those Who Work) [Plates 11 and 12].²² The firm also provided for the recreation of its employees by building a bowling green, situated between the two houses for retired miners, and golf course. The bowling green is still in use today and is rented by the villagers from

²¹ Wemyss Environmental Education Trust (1985) *East Wemyss Village Walkabout* and West Wemyss Environmental Education Centre, *Conservation of Built-up Environment of West Wemyss*.

²² East Wemyss Village Walkabout, p. 45.

the Wemyss family for one shilling a year. The Wemyss coal company was also the first company in Fife to instal pit head baths and locker rooms (see chapter 10).

The female members of the Wemyss family played an important role in fostering close social relations between the company and employees. As with other coal companies they were responsible for helping the sick, giving prizes at schools and flower shows and for distributing alms. East Wemyss had a Generous Sick Society and a Ladies Clothery Society.²³ Lady Dora Mina Kittina Wemyss founded the Wemyss school of needlecraft for the wives and daughters of coalminers in the 1890s [Plate 10]. According to a local story she had met a woman suffering from melancholia following childbirth in the woods around Wemyss castle and out of concern for the plight of this woman founded the needlecraft school. In its heyday the school trained a class of thirty women and girls. The kindness of Mrs Wemyss of Balfour was noted every year in the local press when about thirty old people enjoyed a Christmas dinner.²⁴

The Wemyss family played a major role in the coal-mining industry in Fife over a prolonged period and dominated the lives of the residents of the locality. Although no longer engaged in coal-mining, they continue to reside in the castle at East Wemyss. The legacy of their paternalism remains in the surviving rows of attractive cottages and buildings bearing the white swan of Wemyss, pantiled roofs and crowstepped gables; in the derelict mining shafts that are still called after members of the Wemyss family, the Michael, Mary, Lady Isobel and Victoria pits for example; in the names of

²³ *Ibid*, p. 27.

²⁴ *The Fifeshire Journal*, Thursday, 5 January 1893

village streets that retain associations with mining; and in the deference felt by the local inhabitants to this day. In casual conversation with the author, elderly tenants of former company houses, now managed by Kirkcaldy District Council, spoke with respect for the Wemyss family and praised them for building houses for their workers and for installing lavatories and sculleries. The fact that housing legislation obliged the company to do so did not appear to impinge upon their consciousness.

6.4.3. Paternalism of late nineteenth century coal foundations.

Several new colliery companies were founded in Fife in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These operated mainly in West Fife exploiting the coal beds in the Lochgelly region. As with the long established family firms of Fordell and Wemyss several of the coal-mining enterprises founded in the 1870s and 1880s engaged in paternalism, by adopting the customs of the locality.

The Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company provided company schools for employees' children at Raith and Lochgelly. At Raith the schoolhouse consisted of two of the six houses of School Row joined together. Another school at Broad Street was opened by the Oakley Iron and Coal Company in 1876. Non-colliery pupils at Oakley paid 1/2 per week for lessons while colliery children were educated for free. In Cowdenbeath the reading room was donated to the village by the Cowdenbeath Coal Company and was free of rent and taxes. In Townhill the Coal Company of West Fife, the Cooperative Society and Lilliehall Fireclay Company, donated provisions for the school gala day, held on June 25 1902 to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII. In 1918 Messrs. Henry Ness and Company presented a flag



Plate 11 Post World War I home for retired miners, East Wemyss. The inscription reads "Nisi Dominus Trusti", (Put your Trust in the Lord).



Plate 12 Post World War I home for retired miners, East Wemyss. The inscription reads "Deus Adest Laborantibus" (God Helps those who Work).

pole to the school.²⁵ Representatives of coal companies were also regularly reported in the press for their generosity; for example in a newspaper article entitled "remembering the poor";

"Three Gentlemen widely known for their liberality and kindness, George J Wallace of Newtonhall had given a parcel of tea, with money for sugar Mr. H. V. Haig of Ramornie has supplied twenty-six of the most needy with a cartload of coal each, and Mr. John Gilmore of Montrave, has given his usual cheque of £12 10s."²⁶

In dispensing "liberally" to the poor in this fashion coal company manager conducted themselves in much the same manner as local landed aristocracy. Indeed it can be said that in doing so these self-made men were "aping their betters" and striving for local recognition and social status. Success in business was not enough, these men aspired towards success within the community at large.

The Fife Coal Company is a good example of the management adopting local practice in that it too provided for the welfare and social needs of its workforce. The managers of the Fife Coal Company are interesting in their own right, in that the company was managed for fifty years by one man, Charles Carlow who then handed the management over to his son Charles Augustus Carlow. He in turn transferred control to his nephews the Reid brothers (all of these men were introduced in Chapter 4 in correspondence over mineral leases). Although not a family firm in terms of background wealth and ownership, the management of this public company was kept within one family for three generations.

²⁵ Henderson, W., D. (1981) *Townhill, Dunfermline Coaltown*. Carnegie Trust, Dunfermline.

²⁶ *The Fifeshire Journal*, Thursday 5 January 1893

The Fife Coal Company was founded in 1872 to work the Beath and Blairadam collieries at Kelty. The company commenced work in 1873 at Kelty and had an output of 70,000 tons in its first year. It quickly attained a leading position in the industry. By 1914 the Fife Coal Company Ltd. was the greatest coal-mining concern in Scotland, employing 14,157 men (52.92% of the total number employed in Fife's coalmines) and with an output of four and a half million tons. Longer established (usually family run) firms continued to operate, particularly in east and south east Fife, but on a much smaller scale.

The company gained its prominent position through a series of amalgamations. Between 1896 and 1909 the Fife Coal Company purchased eight small companies operating in west Fife. In 1896 they purchased the Cowdenbeath Coal Company, in 1900 the Lochore and Capletrae Companies, in 1901 the Fife and Kinross Coal Company, in 1902 the Blairadam colliery and brickworks, in 1906 Lassodie Mill colliery and Rosewell Gas Coal Company, in 1907 Valleyfield Colliery and the mineral rights to Culross Estate, in 1909 the Donibristle and Bowhill Coal Company.²⁷

As a result by 1909 the company had an accumulated capital of £1,234,075. The company's selling agents were well established on the continent from the 1880s. By 1911 the Fife Coal Company controlled 3490 houses, of which 2934 were their absolute property and 556 belonged to the mineral proprietors and others who built houses and leased them to the company. These houses were located at Kelty, Ballingry, Scoonie, Blairadam, Lochore, Lumphinnans, Beath and Cowdenbeath.

²⁷ Muir, A., (1958) *The Fife Coal Company Limited. A Short History*. Fife Coal Co. Leven, pps. 13-14.

Charles Carlow, a mining engineer from Carbery in the Lothians, was the company manager for fifty years, from its inception in 1872 to 1922. His son Charles Augustus Carlow became managing director of the firm after his father. The latter was said to have been pompous and aloof, although one contemporary explains that this was as a result of his stammer. In order to disguise this he spoke slowly in a grave tone.²⁸ He remained a bachelor all his life and is said to have had great compassion and to have been sympathetic towards workers. Upon his retirement he donated his home to the miners' welfare fund.²⁹

As with other coal-mining concerns the Fife Coal Company engaged in other forms of paternalism besides housing provision. The company subscribed to the horticultural society of every village in west Fife with which it was connected. It also donated £1,000 per annum from company funds voted by the shareholders for philanthropic purposes.³⁰ This company too adopted the tradition of providing widows and old miners with free housing and house coal either free or at reduced rates. Although as shall be seen in Chapter 7 they did not view their responsibility towards widows as either limitless or interminable.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how paternalism and deference developed and were fostered in Fife. It is clear from the above account that the origins

²⁸ Conversation with Dr. Ronald Cant, St. Andrews, 7 November 1988.

²⁹ Conversation with Dr. Ronald Cant, St. Andrews, 7 November 1988.

³⁰ Muir, A., *Op. cit.* p. 82.

of Fife paternalism and deference lay in in pre-industrial relations of production and that relict features of these relations survived in Fife into the twentieth century. Pre-industrial modes of behaviour were not necessarily passed on through kinship ties or from one generation to another; instead they existed in the ethos of the place, and became part of the locality through socialisation of behaviour.

Fordell village was demolished as unfit to live in and the residents moved to nearby Crossgates and Halbeath. Bob Holman's recollections of life in the village of Fordell are laden with nostalgia for times past and deference towards the coal-owners. At no stage in the book was criticism towards the coal-owners or coal managers expressed. A good deal of the deference expressed was related to nostalgia for the strong community identity that pervaded all aspects of village life. Even the community's suspicion of and refusal to accept "strangers" into their midst was presented as a virtue. The Hendersons of Fordell were respected and admired because they were responsible through their coal-mines for the very existence of the community.

Chapter 7, the final in Part II, continues the theme of paternalism. The chapter returns to housing and outlines how the houses were provided and allocated to workers. It is the first chapter to view houses from the point of view of the miners rather than from that of the coal-owners. The chapter demonstrates the link between paternalism and control and introduces the vulnerable areas in the paternalism and deference relationship. It is the bridge to Part III of the thesis where the breakdown in social relations of production is considered.

Chapter 7

Colliers and company housing.

". . . colliery owners, at first did not make any charge for rental at all, and did not charge for the firecoal, but gradually it has become a commercial business, and the rental charged is rapidly approaching the rental charged by private property owners . . ." ¹

7. 1. Introduction

Chapter 6 described the positive and benevolent faces of paternalism and deference. Fife coal-owners catered for all the welfare needs of their employees and in return they gained the respect and loyalty of the community. In Chapter 7 we return to housing and examine it from the workers' point of view; i.e. how it was allocated and what price coal-miners had to pay for the benefits of coal-company housing. It will be shown that the relationship was based upon power and social control. The extent of miners' vulnerability in the relationship will become evident. The chapter therefore continues to illustrate the manifestations of paternalism but also highlights the aspects of paternalism that were under severe social and economic pressure in the post war years. The chapter leads in to Part III, the final section of the thesis; where the decline in close social relations in Fife mining communities, which occurred in parallel with the decline in coal company housing provision, will be considered.

¹ SRO WRH DD 6/1170: Deputation of Scottish miners representatives to Lord Pentland at the Scottish Office, London 2 Oct. 1911. Quotation from Mr. W. Adamson to Lord Pentland. (Mr. Adamson (1863-1938) was general secretary of the Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan Miners Association from 1908 to 1928; general secretary of the Fife, Clackmannan and Kinross Mine-workers Association from 1928 to 1936; Labour M.P. for West Fife from 1910 to 1931 and Secretary of State for Scotland for 1924, and 1929 to 1931.)

7. 2. Housing provision in mining communities.

The provision of accommodation acted as an inducement to skilled colliers to work for coal companies and to settle in particular mining districts. In the absence of other agencies of housing provision the miners often had no alternative but to remain with the same company. The system worked to the advantage of both colliers and coal-owners so long as the colliers' skills were of sufficient value to warrant the provision of housing. Once labour became abundantly and cheaply available the miner and his family were in a considerably weaker position in the relationship.

Coal-owners were both landlords and employers. A collier had no security of tenure and was guaranteed a home only so long as he was employed. The management of both employment and the home bestowed upon the coal-owners considerable power of social control. While not denying a genuine concern on the part of some coal companies for the welfare of their employees, it should be remembered that the ultimate motive was to attract and maintain a guaranteed supply of labour to sustain output and profits. Charles Carlow, managing director of the Fife Coal Company from 1873 to 1923 wrote in 1911 that his company provided houses for the number of workers necessary to sustain the output of coal that the company required.² His attitude was typical of late nineteenth and twentieth century coal managers.

Tenure of company houses generally ceased on the termination of

² SRO. WRH DD 6/1170. Memorandum by Mr. Charles Carlow Managing Director of the Fife Coal Company Ltd. on the question of housing accommodation in Fifeshire collieries, prepared at the suggestion of John Ross Esq., LLD Dunfermline.

employment or on dismissal. It could also be terminated through no fault of either party; by an unforeseen event such as a national emergency. This was the very situation that arose in Fife following the First World War. Later in the chapter it will be shown that the Fife Coal Company sought to eject war widows from company premises on the grounds that the company could not afford to accommodate over 200 widows as the houses were needed for able bodied men.³

In the eighteenth century when colliers were bonded to the mines, coalmasters provided them with all their material needs. Each collier was in receipt of specific goods and services at various stages in the life cycle; birth, apprenticeship, marriage, birth of children, death. An elaborate system of mutual dependence and obligation evolved based on the gift and receipt of "arles".⁴ The free provision of a home, occasionally a garden and free fire coal were elements of contractual relationship. Even after the abolition of bondage in 1799 colliers still continued to be hired on an annual basis and were provided with a free home for the duration of the contract. The homes of colliers and their families were "run-up" where and when needed and demolished when the mine was worked out and the colliers moved on to another site. In the 1790s in Clackmannan a collier, with his wife and daughter acting as coal bearers had a free house, yard and coal supply and earned 12s. for a four day week. These houses remained free until the 1877 miners' strike when the miners were threatened with a wage reduction and the imposition of house rent (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.). The Lanarkshire

³ SRO WRH DD6/1172:, 7255/28: Miners' Housing in Fife . Occupancy of war widows.

⁴ "Arles"; money given in confirmation of a bargain (earnest money) especially that given when a servant is hired. In operation from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century.

miners of the 1830s were also provided with free accommodation.⁵

The essential point is that because of the early history of the industry there was, by the middle of the nineteenth century, an established tradition of Scottish coal-owners being responsible for providing houses for coal miners, and that the houses should be free to the company tenants. The provision of housing was an integral part of the "bond" of mutual dependence that existed between coal owner and miner. Although this relationship weakened over time its effects were felt well into the twentieth century.

How company houses were allocated to employees depended to a great extent on the tradition of the locality. Differences arose between coal-mining districts as a result of variations in the origins and development of the enterprises. Precedence and tradition played a significant role in dictating management behaviour towards allocation of company housing. According to Daunton, whether or not rent was charged for property depended on the relative age of the mining operation as well as on the outlook of management.⁶ He compared and contrasted the allocation system that arose in the Great Northern coalfield of Durham and Northumberland with those of the South Wales coalfield. In the case of the Durham and Northumberland coal field the industry was long established and company houses were provided rent free. In South Wales on the other hand coal extraction began in the mid-nineteenth century. There rent was

⁵ Campbell, A. B., (1979) *The Lanarkshire Miners. A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775-1874*. John Donald, Edinburgh.

⁶ Daunton, M. J., (1980). Miners Housing in South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield 1860-1914. *International Review of Social History*, 25 pps. 143-175.

either charged by the companies or the colliers rented homes on the open market.

Variations in housing provision and allocation also occurred within as well as between mining districts. Campbell's work on Lanarkshire highlighted the differences in housing consumption within the coalfield.⁷ In the Coatbridge district the houses were all company property whereas in Larkhall the colliers, in the tradition of the weavers of the area, formed building clubs and erected their own homes. Campbell asserted that where workers own their home they were more responsible and sedentary, whereas those living in company houses had little or no attachment to their home or the locality. This is not universally true. Company ownership of housing did not necessarily prevent attachment to place, just as the age of the mining operation did not on its own explain variations in housing provision and consumption. Local allocation arrangements were a result of a complex combination of internal and external factors. In Fife, for example, the majority of colliers lived in coal company houses, but were known in the 1870s throughout Scotland as a stable and sedentary workforce. Here too the extraction of coal had a long history and yet there were variations in housing allocation. Some companies provided houses rent free, while others charged rent.

The erection of company housing was financed through company funds. In the early days of coal exploitation and the erection of company housing a financial return was not expected for investment in housing stock. Return was "in kind", in the form of a stable sedentary workforce. By the late

⁷ Campbell, A.B., *Op. cit.*

nineteenth century all expenditure had to be justified and was expected to show a tangible return in the form of dividends to shareholders and partners. Management became concerned with reducing fixed costs and increasing variable costs. Charging rent and the gradual withdrawal from housing provision in favour of higher wages or rent allowances were methods of reducing fixed costs and increasing variable costs. This shift in emphasis was one part of the evolution of coal company management.

Melling has identified and outlined several methods of financing the erection of coal company housing.⁸ The first involved direct provision by companies through the erection, purchase or improvement of houses. The second, the building of houses by private investors or speculators who sold or leased the properties to coal companies. Alternatively the coal owners could offer builders capital or land at favourable terms. The contractor could sell or lease the houses to the company or on the open market. Thirdly, the houses could be erected by building clubs or public utility societies; either on the workers own initiative or through the sponsorship of companies. Fourthly, the miners could construct their own houses by private contract. Fifthly, the coal companies could erect houses with the aid of State grants and assistance schemes. And finally, the State could be responsible for the erection of housing through the Local Authorities.

In Fife mining villages the first and second methods were the primary agencies of housing provision until the aftermath of the First World War. Such provision was generally under the aegis of mineral leases as explained in Chapter 4. When State subsidies became available following the 1919 and

⁸ Melling, J., (1981) "Employers, Industrial Housing and the Evolution of Company Welfare Policies in Britain's Heavy Industry: West Scotland 1870-1920." *International Review of Social History*, 26, 255-301.

1923 Housing Acts the fifth and sixth methods of financing housing predominated. By then dwellings were either erected by coal companies with the aid of housing subsidies or constructed solely by local authorities.

There is some evidence to suggest that Fife miners were encouraged to erect their own houses, but this allegedly met with little success. The Fife Coal Company is said to have tried more than once to get workers to build their own homes. The proposed scheme involved the granting of loans to the workers at an interest rate of 4% or 5%. The houses were to remain the property of the coal company until their cost was reduced by one third whereupon the builder would receive title to the property. Only a few houses were built this way and an attempt to introduce the scheme at Lochore in 1911 met with complete failure.⁹

Fife coal-owners employed local contractors to build housing, and there were plenty of builders willing to tender for a contract. Even during the building slump of the First World War there were six contractors in Fife and neighbouring counties. The Wemyss Coal Company employed its own architect Mr. Alex Todd, described as a joiner in the valuation roll of 1880 and as Clerk of Works to the company in 1916. As already mentioned he designed company houses of very high standard at East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss and Methil. The Fife Coal Company also employed a company architect, Mr. D. W. Robertson, who ran the company's housing office in Cowdenbeath. (Both Todd and Robertson were introduced in Chapter 4

⁹SRO WRH DD 6/1170: Memorandum by Mr. Charles Carlow, Managing Director of the Fife Coal Company Ltd. on the question of housing accommodation in Fifeshire collieries. Statement from the above memo. on attempts by the Fife Coal Company to encourage workers to build their own homes; also statement by Mr. Dodds, a member of the deputation of miner's representatives, to Lord Pentland, Scottish Office on 21 November 1911.

when the Kelty, Leuchatsbeath and Donibristle mineral leases were being considered.) Each coal company manufactured its own bricks as an offshoot of mining. These were used as fire bricks and in the construction of houses. Chimneys were constructed of fire bricks and floors, as at Fordell in 1884, were often lain with bricks.

The fabric of the buildings themselves required considerable investment and the cost of the maintenance of the stock increased over time. With State intervention in health and housing company expenditure in housing stock also increased. From the 1890s onwards Local Authorities demanded certain standards of construction and facilities (see Chapter 3). Mineral leases also stipulated that the housing stock should be maintained in habitable condition (see Chapter 4). Where the coal companies erected housing on land feued from the land owner they gained some return for their investment if the proprietor took over the properties at valuation. The proprietor only did so if it was feasible to feu the houses to another mineral tenant or on the open market. If this could not be done the houses were left to the coal company to dispose of. For coal companies the cost of demolition was generally prohibitive and the resale of materials did not give a return for costs. In instances where houses had been erected by the landed proprietor and leased to the coal company with the minerals the tenant had to guarantee their return in good condition (see Chapter 4). Under both types of lease the onus was on the coal company to maintain the housing stock. Therefore the erection of houses was not a "one off" investment but required considerable commitment of company funds over prolonged periods of time.

Every new group of houses being built was better than the last leading to a gradual improvement in condition. This allegedly showed as desire on the

part of the coal-owners to provide "suitable accommodation" and on the occupants' part to obtain a good standard of housing. Nevertheless housing conditions were improved largely due to government pressure and legislation on health and sanitation rather than as a result of the coal companies' desire to raise standards.

7. 3. Coal company employees and tied housing.

Coal miners rented their homes from colliery companies under general company regulations that applied to all company employees, rather than under a missive of let. These general regulations usually stated that the houses were let only for the duration of the employment. Since rent was generally deducted fortnightly from the miners' wages the let could be terminated at a fortnights' notice. The agreement between coal owner and collier was not a lease but rather a contract of service and was termed in legal parlance a "service occupancy". The houses were referred to as "tied houses". The conditions under which a collier occupied his home were thus governed by his conditions of employment. It was implicit in the service occupancy that tenure of the house ceased with the termination of employment. An occupancy was only assumed to be one of "service" if the occupation of the house was necessary for the execution of the employment:

"where the occupation is necessary for the performance of service and the occupier is required to reside in the house in order to perform the service. . . the occupation is that of a servant and not of a tenant."¹⁰

¹⁰ Paton, G.C.H., and Cameron, J.G.S., (1967) *The Law of Landlord and Tenant in Scotland*. The Scottish Universities Law Institute, Aberdeen, p. 9.

If the house belonged to "the master" and if the occupation of the property by the employee was of mutual benefit to both parties the employer was entitled to vacant possession of the house. If "the servant" refused to vacate the premises the owner was entitled to seek an ejection order.¹¹ In Fife the miner, if he wished, could view the property before taking up tenancy. The period of let was fourteen days and the tenant was obliged to vacate the premises when his employment terminated. After being sacked, a miner was sometimes allowed to stay on in the house for a further fortnight, or even a month, during which time he frequently paid no rent.

Evidence of how the system operated can be gleaned from coal company records at the Scottish Records Office. The houses at Capledrae colliery in Fife in 1837, for example, were erected to accommodate the colliers attached to the mine and were allocated rent free. The colliers were engaged by the fortnight and were obliged to quit their homes on a fortnights' notice. In a letter to the company solicitor the proprietors of Capledrae requested advice as to whether on dismissing a worker at the end of a fortnights' notice, they could without legal authority eject him from his home, and use force if necessary. The owners argued that if the collier refused to leave, production would be impeded through lack of accommodation for new workers. Counsel's opinion was that the workers could not be removed without lawful authority in the form of a warrant of ejection from the sheriff. ¹²

¹¹ Following the Rent Restrictions Act of 1965 the owner of a tied house could not act against a "service occupancy" except through the courts.

¹²SRO GRH GD1/142/II/21: Records relating to Capledrae Colliery including a memorial dated 1837 for the proprietors of the colliery, Young, Aytoun and Rutherford, containing information on housing and on road access to the pits.

In February 1893 a case concerning this very issue came before the Sheriff Court of Dunfermline, Fife. James Carmichael, a miner from Wellwood Colliery took an action against Thomas Spowart and Company Limited, Elgin Collieries, for the payment of £2. 9s. 8d. wages due to him.¹³ The action was taken to test the right of the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners to retain the wages of former employees who had left their employment, until such time as they vacated the company house they occupied. James Carmichael had ceased working for the company on 24 December 1892, but stayed on in a company house. In order to ensure that he would vacate the premises the company withheld wages already earned by Carmichael.¹⁴ The coal company defended its action by referring to the general regulations and conditions of employment, under which Carmichael obtained possession of the dwelling house belonging to the company at Wellwood, and retained the house under article four of the conditions of employment. By that rule he was bound to remove from the house upon cessation of employment. The company claimed that it was impossible for them to carry out their mining enterprise without homes for their employees. By remaining on in the house Carmichael was therefore preventing the company from hiring another miner and thus hindering coal production.¹⁵ Carmichael on the other hand claimed that the coal company had no right to withhold wages earned by him and pleaded that the rule was illegal, null, void and contrary to the Truck Act.

Sheriff Gillespie found in favour of the Coal Company and stated that there

¹³ *The Fifehire Journal*, Thursday 2 February 1893, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *The Fifehire Journal*, Thursday 23 February 1893.

was nothing unreasonable in their action. The employer was entitled to keep the wages in hand until the worker fulfilled his part of the contract. However, had the company withheld the wages to clear the tenant's debt with a shopkeeper the company's actions would have contravened the Truck Act of 1887.¹⁶

7. 4. The imposition of rent.

It is not clear from surviving records when exactly rent was first charged for company housing in Scotland's coalfields. It would appear that coal companies took up the option at different stages. It does seem however that there is a broad historical sequence of coal-miners' housing being allocated rent free until about the 1850s. Colliers' houses at Capledrae in Fife were rent free in the 1830s,¹⁷ while at Fordell rent was charged in 1855 and 1860¹⁸. The reason for the imposition of rent at that stage is unclear but may be connected with the Lands Valuation (Scotland) Act of 1854, which provided for the payment of rates on all real estate.

Company houses were rented by the fortnight and rent was either collected or deducted from the fortnightly wage packet. The tenants' tenure of a company house was completely at the will of management. A fortnights' notice to quit could be given to any undesirable tenant. This encouraged

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The Truck Act 1887, 50 & 51 Vict c. 46.

¹⁷ SRO GRH GD 1/42/II/21: Memorial dated 1837 for the Proprietors of Capledrae Colliery in the County of Fife.

¹⁸ SRO GRH GD 172/901: List of houses occupied at Fordell Colliery on 10 March 1855 and on 7 April 1860 together with details of rent charged for each.

dependency among the workers and gave the coal owners considerable power over their employees. Demand for housing was high and accommodation scarce. Hence it was in the interest of the collier to keep his slate clean and not risk eviction.

Although the owner could not eject the miner without recourse to the law and this might be costly and time consuming, the threat of eviction was nonetheless ever present. Incidents of striking miners and trade union activists being ejected from their homes are well documented; the justification always being that they disrupted discipline and the smooth operation of the work (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5).

In 1892 the miners' union sent a deputation to the Scottish Office seeking an end to "tenancy at will".¹⁹ The delegation was accompanied by several Scottish members of parliament. The representatives stated that no notice to quit was ever necessary before a miner was turned out of his house, although a statutory interval of ten days was necessary before the miner could be ejected. Mr. Robert Smillie of Larkhall, Lanarkshire, stated that when miners were turned out of company property it was always as a means of exercising pressure in a trade dispute. The delegation requested a statutory three months notice to quit. Neither the Secretary of State nor the Lord Advocate promised immediate action, and it was not until 1898 that a Bill was introduced to Parliament providing for three months notice by either party or by mutual consent.²⁰

¹⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Deputation of 18 March 1892; Mr. Small and Mr. Robert Smillie of Larkhall waited upon the Secretary for Scotland and the Lord Advocate.

²⁰ Tenure of Workmens' Houses Bill 1898 (61 Vict. Bill 97), 1899 (62 Vict. Bill 81), Tenure of Workmens' Houses Act 1900 (63 & 64 Vict. c. 59); The Scotsman 19 March 1892.

It is not clear from the available records when rent was first charged for company housing in Fife's mining communities. Information and evidence can only be gleaned from surviving rent books. These record weekly or fortnightly and annual rent, arrears, where the tenant worked, other deductions including firecoal, gas and water, and occasionally the occupants' date of entry and their previous address.

In Fife's coal-mining companies rents in all cases bar the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company, were deducted from the fortnightly wage. The amount deducted often covered more than rent. The Balgonie Coal Company deducted rent, taxes, an amount for gas, firecoal, water supply and the sweep²¹; the Fife Coal Company deducted a sum that covered rent, rates, gas, water and firecoal²²; the Wemyss Coal Company deducted rent and taxes²³; while the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company deducted rent weekly and only recorded rent and arrears.²⁴

Most of the rent books contain information on where the tenant was employed but unfortunately the column concerned was not always completed. Where these details are recorded they give useful information on where the miners lived in relation to their work and on the companies allocation procedures. Rents charged for houses varied from company to

²¹ SRO WRH CB3/127: Balgonie Coal Company, Fife. Rent Book.

²² SRO WRH CB3/126:Fife Coal Company Ltd., Fife Rent Books 1911.

²³ SRO WRH CB1/916 and CB1/917: Wemyss Coal Company, Fife. Rent Books 1906-1913 and 1920-36.

²⁴ SRO WRH CB2/167: Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company Ltd., Rent Book 1933.

company and from district to district. The differences in rent levels depended on several factors including type of house, number of rooms, the age of the property, facilities provided, wages of the workers as well as on managerial outlook.

There is no evidence in any of the surviving rent books that Fife coal owners allocated different standards of housing to certain classes of collier or that they gave preferential housing to particular workers other than coal managers. Cottages of higher valuation than colliers' houses were allocated to the underground manager at West Wemyss, Henry Hutton, who occupied a house and garden valued at £6 in 1870-71, and to William Carey, "manager of the collierie" who occupied Wemyss Cottage and garden accessed at £10.²⁵ Houses built for coal company managers still survive at Victoria Avenue in East Wemyss, located beyond the Michael Pit and the site of the pit head baths.²⁶

"Officials" of the Lochgelly company occupied rent free cottages with such names as "The Oaks", "Lamond View", "Camir Cottage". The Lochgelly rent books cover company property at Lochgelly itself and at Raith and Dundonald, all in West Fife. Each of the village streets housed miners working in the Jenny Gray pit, the Minto pit and the Nellie pit. Most of the Dundonald tenants worked at Minto numbers one and number two pits, with a handful working at Nellie pit. The Raith tenants worked at Dora pit, Jenny Gray pit, Minto number two and Nellie pits. A few were described as mechanics, but apart from these no specific occupations are given. All of the

²⁵ SRO GRH VR 101/16: Parish of Wemyss 1870-71.

²⁶ *East Wemyss Village Walkabout* , p. 43.

miners, no matter where they worked, were housed in similar properties with identical rents.²⁷

The records of the Fife Coal Company for Denend village in 1911-12 are far more detailed. They record where exactly at the pit the collier worked. Denend workers worked the five foot coal, the split coal, at the brickworks, as firemen, as enginemen and as hutch repairers. There is no indication that any one miner occupied a house better than his neighbour. At Smithy Hill the tenants worked at the pithead, split and five foot coal, and as oncost workers. At Balgreggie, the oversman, joiner, dispatcher, pithead worker, waggon worker, locomotive driver and five foot coal miner were all living in houses with the same rent. The same applies to the workers living on the miners' rows. The tenants living between First Street and Nineteenth Street all occupied houses with the same rents, taxes and water rates.²⁸

The rent books of the Wemyss Coal Company are the most extensive available, covering the years 1906-13, 1921-36 and 1936-47.²⁹ The company was proprietor of over a thousand properties in West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Methil, Denbeath and Buckhaven. Unfortunately no details of where the tenants worked were recorded in the rent books, and since the villages included shops, libraries, schools, churches, and a hospital it cannot be assumed that everyone worked in the mines. However through cross referencing with the valuation rolls and wage books³⁰ it can be ascertained that miners who worked the Muiredge pit

²⁷ SRO WRH CB2/167.

²⁸ SRO WRH CB 2/167.

²⁹ SRO WRH CB 1/916;917;918.

³⁰ SRO WRH CB1/447 and CB1/448, Reel 453: Wemyss Coal Company wage

lived in East Wemyss, Buckhaven, Denbeath, Methil and Coaltown of Wemyss; those working the Wellesley pit lived at Denbeath, Methil and Coaltown; and those mining in the Michael Pit lived in East Wemyss and Coaltown of Wemyss. Despite the lack of detailed information there is no direct evidence to suggest a hierarchy of accommodation and preferential treatment, other than the cases of managers mentioned above.

In the large utopian style planned villages referred to in Chapter 1, housing was used by employers as a means of "rewarding" particular groups of workers. There is little evidence that Fife coal companies did so. There is some evidence to suggest that it may have happened in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as records refer to coal hewers being supplied with a house and garden. The hewer of coal was at the pinnacle of the mining hierarchy as each male child had to serve an apprenticeship before reaching hewer status. However this can be explained by the fact that wives and daughters acted as putters and bearers until the 1842 Mines Act, and since sons were apprenticed to a hewer until qualified to work on their own and only then could they marry and set up their own home, only coal hewers needed to be provided with a company house. All other workers in the mining team were part of the family unit living in the family houses, with the hewer at the head. The system disintegrated when women and children under ten years were banned from underground employment in 1842, the advent of mechanisation and the use of mechanical coal-cutters at the end of the nineteenth century. Mining became increasingly de-skilled, requiring labour power and not coal cutting skills.

Details of rents charged by various Fife coal companies are given in a report

books 1905-1909 and 1916-23.

of the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association of 1899.³¹ The report shows that a variety of rents were charged for similar properties. Rents for houses in the western district of Fife and Clackmannan were on average higher than those charged in the eastern district. If a house had a garden the rent for the property did not increase. In 1911 Charles A. Carlow remarked that miners who occupied new houses would not cultivate ground or gardens, preferring instead to buy vegetables from the cart at the door and to employ their spare time in sport and leisure. Where families had lived for several generations in one home and where the garden had always been cultivated the practice continued, and was not only "pleasant to the eye" but also "profitable to the pockets".³²

Houses in Fife and Clackmannan were of various types. The old and dilapidated buildings belonged to collieries worked over a long period of time and nearing their end where the owners were said to have been "naturally unwilling to expend money" and only wished to see out the mineral lease. According to Dr. Dewar, the Sanitary Inspector for Health in Fife, such houses only represented about 8%-12% of the total number of miners houses in Fifeshire in 1909.³³

Rents charged for company housing depended on the number of rooms and the facilities of the houses as well as on the age of the properties. It is

³¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association: Report dated October 1899 by Committee of Coalmasters' Association in Regard to House Rents paid by Miners, etc. and the Tenant's share of Taxes payable thereon.

³²SRO WRH DD6/1170: Charles Carlow memorandum.

³³ 1909, Cd. 5288 LGB (Scotland), Fifteenth Annual Report, XL 447.

perhaps surprising that the 1899 report of the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association stated that three roomed houses commanded a lower rent than two and one roomed dwellings. One apartment homes were apparently the most popular throughout Fife and Clackmannan. The greater demand for smaller properties led to higher rent. New homes with sanitary arrangements, sculleries etc., commanded higher rents than those without. However as far as the coal-owners were concerned they did not give an adequate return for investment, apart from taxes. In 1899 there were a large number of two apartment houses with no running water and these were said to be the most popular with the miners.³⁴

In 1899 there were some four roomed houses in Fife. These were the property of the Balgonie Coal Company (houses with scullery), Donibristle Coal Company (without scullery), Thomas Spowart and Company (with scullery), Fife Coal Company at Ballingry, Wemyss and Beath (without scullery), Wemyss Coal Company at Wemyss (with scullery) and the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company (without scullery). Annual rental for these houses varied from £5 to £10 1s. 1d. for those with sculleries and from £5 10s. to £7 3s. for those without a scullery. No two companies charged the same amount of rent. Five roomed houses with sculleries were the property of the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company alone, with an annual rent of £6 1s.

Three roomed dwellings were owned by seven of the ten Fife coal companies in operation in 1899. Four of these also owned three apartment dwellings with sculleries. There were nineteen different levels of rent

³⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170: 1899 Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association Report on Rent.

charged for these houses, varying from £11 14s. at Beath (Fife Coal Company) to £4 11s. at Balgonie. None of the companies charged the same rent for three roomed houses. Even within the same company different amounts were charged for houses in different villages. For example, Fife Coal Company property at Ballingry, Scoonie, Wemyss and Beath were all priced differently. Three apartment dwellings without scullery were owned by Fordell Company, Dysart Collieries, Donibristle Colliery Co. (at Aberdour and Beath), Wemyss Coal Company and Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company. There were forty different levels of rent charged for these. The cheapest available was at Aberdour (£1 6s. 8d.) and the dearest was at Beath (£9 15s.).

In 1911, in a letter to Lord Pentland concerning the 1899 report from the Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners, the issues of rent, condition and accommodation, in mining communities were again addressed.³⁵ Although circumstances had changed since 1899 the rental levels had remained much the same, except that they had to be increased to meet increases in ratable valuation assessment. On the question of accommodation available to miners and their families, it was stated that the size of the houses rented to miners was governed by their own habits and the amount they were willing to pay in rent.³⁶ Coal-owners did not consider rents "excessive", especially if a return was to be obtained for capital expenditure and provision made for upkeep and repair. It was also stated that provision had to be made by coal owners for the payment of tenants taxes which were almost always paid by the house owners.³⁷ It is repeatedly stressed that the moderate rent charged

³⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Letter concerning conditions in Fife miners' housing, dated 18 February 1911, from John Ross to Lord Pentland at Whitehall.

³⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Letter dated 18 February 1911.

³⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Letter dated 18 February 1911.

covered tenants' taxes. In all of the surviving records relating to rent the tenants paid the coal-owners a lump sum (or a standard amount was deducted from wages) and from this sum a proportion went to taxes and other deductions (water, light, heat, etc. In some cases there were also deductions for tool sharpening). The rest went to the coal-owners for rent. Hence the tenants paid their own taxes although they were paid through the coal companies.

7. 5. Concessions to the old, retired, widowed and ill.

Catering for the special needs of the old, retired, ill and widowed was an important aspect of paternalism in its hey-day during the nineteenth century. All of the Fife coal companies granted concessions in one form or another to the needy of the mining community, usually in the form of free living accommodation or partial relief from rent. This form of paternalism was much more developed in long established communities such as Wemyss and Fordell than in the coal companies founded in the last quarter of the century. It will be recalled that accommodation dedicated to retired miners was built after the First World War in East Wemyss (see Chapter 6 and Plates 11 and 12) and that widows were given free food at Fordell in the early eighteenth century (see Chapter 1) and were later permitted to run small shops in their living rooms (see Chapter 6) . It was also noted in Chapter 4, when considering the case of the Houston brothers, that by 1930 the Fife Coal Company had ceased to grant such concessions as relief from rent to old miners. It will be shown in this and the next section that a gradual shift in emphasis took place in Fife in the early years of this century; from a situation whereby the coal companies took full responsibility for the old and widowed to a situation whereby they expected the local authority to do so. This change in attitude will be demonstrated through consideration

of war widows who were the subject of heated debate in Fife between 1918-20.

In the early nineteenth century widows, the ill and retired workers were allowed free accommodation at Fordell and were given a measure of meal every week. In 1814 there were twenty seven widows and widowers at Fordell, one of which was described as a beggar³⁸. In 1853 Christine and Betty Muir who occupied a one room house at Muir Row and were both unable to work were provided with one "peck" of meal each week.³⁹ Richard Penman and the widow Penman, also unable to work, received the same amount. In Black Row the widows Fife and Jaap received a peck of meal each per week. While in Red Row Margaret Mary Beveridge and Helen Paternie were given one peck and a half a peck of meal respectively. In School Row the widow Mitchell also had half a peck of meal. In the cases of two widows whose daughters were working, no meal was provided. In all there were fifteen widows at the village all living in one roomed houses.⁴⁰ In the same year William Burrell of School Row, who was unable to work, received one peck of meal per week.

By 1855 rent was being paid at Fordell; £3:3:0 per annum for two roomed houses and £2:2:0 per annum for one roomed dwellings. In Fordell Square widow Orrick occupied a one roomed house, in Cameron Row widow Russell and in Wemyss Square widow Gibb both occupied single apartment

³⁸ SRO GRH GD 172/848: List dated 3 Sept. 1814 of Sir John Henderson's colliery houses at Fordell with details of the families occupying them.

³⁹ SRO GRH GD 172/689: List dated 26 Sept. 1853 of the population of the houses about Fordell Colliery. A "peck" of meal is half a bushel.

⁴⁰ SRO GRH GD 172/689.

houses. They all paid £2:2:0 per annum in rent. There was no record of houses being allocated free to tenants in that year.⁴¹

In 1884 when a survey of the condition of the houses in the village was undertaken there was ample evidence that certain individuals received free accommodation. In Coles Terrace Duncan McKay occupied a two roomed rent free house. It was assessed as having a rent value of 3/10 per fortnight. Duncan McKay however was one of the two men carrying out the survey of the village and therefore a senior company employee rather than a collier. The "large" School house was occupied by John Dryburgh free of rent and H. Burt an oversman lived rent free in a three apartment house.⁴² It is perhaps no surprise that these men lived in homes that were rent free.

There are others, however, with no such claim to free dwellings who nonetheless lived in them. In Old Terrace James Stevenson lived rent free in a one roomed house valued at 2/1 per fortnight. Number twelve Douglas Cottages (2/- per fortnight) was occupied rent free by Andrew Inglis. Charles Walls lived in a rent free property at number four Monteath Terrace. This was a two roomed house which would have commanded a rent of 3/10 per fortnight. In Cannon Row Mrs. Barclay lived in a one roomed dwelling in "fair order" and paid no rent. In Muir Row Quentin Lock, a man "of weak mind" paid no rent for his one roomed house and Archibald Venmar had paid no rent since 1881.

⁴¹ SRO GRH GD 172/901: Lists dated 1855 and 1860 of houses at Fordell Colliery.

⁴² SRO GRH GD 172/942: Report dated 2 April 1884 on visitations to all of the colliers' houses at Fordell.

It would seem from the evidence given above that widows, the old and the infirm were not guaranteed free accommodation for life. Once their circumstances changed they were charged rent. In 1884, for example, the widow Donaldson who occupied a rent free one roomed house in Durkan Row was to have her rent of 1/8 per fortnight paid by her son. Another widow, Mrs. Hurt, who occupied what was called a one and a half house, and who had paid no rent for six years was to be charged 3/- in the future.⁴³ There were no reasons given for this change in policy. Tenants could claim free houses. It would also appear that the onus was upon the tenant to claim free accommodation. In one case a female tenant claimed a free house for her ploughman! The Landlord, Henderson of Fordell was to look into this matter at the earliest opportunity. Unfortunately there is no record of the outcome in this case.⁴⁴

Free housing was provided at Wemyss right up to the late 1920s. Details are available from the surviving rent books covering the years 1905 to 1913 and 1920 to 1946. It is often difficult to ascribe a house as free (unless specifically stated as such) as rent not paid in one year could be paid in bulk in the next. For example at Methil Den in 1915 five premises have no record of rent or arrears. These were the homes of Dr. MacGregor the medical practitioner, A. Harris a washer superintendent, Jonathan Clark, a traffic superintendent, Thomas Crowley an oversman and the premises of the Buckhaven Co-op Society. However they all paid the rent annually in one sum of £30, £20, £15, £10, £50 respectively. Therefore the fact that there was no record of payment is not enough evidence to ascertain whether a house was given

⁴³ SRO GRH GD 172/941: Report dated 2 April 1884 on a visitation to all colliery houses at Fordell.

⁴⁴ SRO GRH GD 172/941.

rent free or not.

Occasionally the word "free" was recorded. But, this did not always mean that the house was free indefinitely. Some houses were free for six months and thereafter rent was charged, while in other cases payment of arrears was waived while rent continued to be charged. Through tracing rent records at Wemyss over the years 1905-13 and 1920-27 some interesting patterns emerge. Concessions in rent and arrears were granted to specific categories of people; the old and retired miners, widows and war widows.

From 1905 to 1913 rents were collected annually in fortnightly instalments commencing in September. For the years 1920-24 the rent at Wemyss was recorded biannually; September to March and March to September. From October 1924 rent payments were again recorded annually, but this time the year commenced in October and ended at the end of September.⁴⁵

At Wemyss the policy of providing free accommodation for the widowed, retired and ill continued well into the twentieth century. There were however inconsistencies in the allocation of free properties. Some tenants were given concessions for life while others received short-term benefit. Concessions were granted in the form of relief from arrears, non payment of rent while ill, free rent for half a year or more or rent free accommodation. War widows in particular were sometimes given relief of rent for life while some paid rent, and others were free until March 1922 but paid rent thereafter. Government regulation concerning pension rights

⁴⁵ The details given below for the years 1906-1913 are all taken from the Wemyss Coal Company rent book for these years: SRO WRH CB1/916. Those given for 1920-27 are derived from the rent book for the years 1920-36: SRO WRH CB1/917.

for widows of deceased soldiers and sailors may have been the reason behind the granting of free accommodation for a short period.

In 1905-06 at Main Street, West Wemyss M. Struthers, James Black and the widow Hunter paid no rent and there was no record of the accumulation of arrears. (In 1906-07 there was £5 entered in the "standing empty" column opposite M. Struthers name. This column is confusing as it sometimes records the number of weeks the house was empty and others record arrears. The latter information should have been recorded in the next column and therefore clerical error is the most likely explanation. In the case of M. Struthers however it is unclear whether the £5 represents rent paid, arrears or the value of the house.)

In 1905-06 at Main St. West Wemyss the widow Hunter paid no rent and there was no record of the accumulation of arrears. In 1906-17 her house was valued at £1:19:0 per annum and "free" was written into the rental column. In Cross Wynd, West Wemyss three widows paid no rent in 1905-06 and 1906-07. In the Coaltown of Wemyss however the widows Rodger and Fairfull of Old South Row paid rent, and continued to do so throughout 1906-07. In 1906-17 widow Laing of Main Street, West Wemyss paid 3/8 per fortnight for her house while the three widows of Cross Wynd remained free.

During the year 1907-08 Mrs. Bernard and widow Hunter continued to be recorded as "free" tenants. In 1908-09 at West Wemyss the widows Hunter, Foster Crombie and Dryburgh (widow of John Dryburgh) all lived in free houses with an annual rental value of £1:19:0 each. During 1909-10 Mrs. Bernard of Main Street, West Wemyss occupied a rent free house worth £4:0:2 per annum. Widows Hunter, Foster Crombie, Dryburgh, remained

rent free, while widow Laing of Main Street paid £6:10:0 a year for her house. Widow Fairfull moved from one house in Old South Row to another. She paid 5/- a month in rent (£3:5:0 a year) and moved to a house with an annual rent of £3:9:4. In 1908-09 she was in arrears for the sum of £12:6:0. Why she moved to a more expensive house is unknown.

During 1910-11 widow Hunter of Main Street, West Wemyss was crossed off the rent book and widow David Watson of Cross Wynd, West Wemyss changed address. Widow Lumsden lived in Broad Wynd, West Wemyss and paid 6/- a fortnight in rent. Widow Rodger lived at Store Row Coaltown of Wemyss and widow Dryburgh at Barons Row. The former was still in residence in 1913 paying 5/- a fortnight while the latter had by then moved from the site. There is no record of where she or Mrs. Lindsay, the other female tenant of the Row, had moved to. Widows Foster Crombie and Dryburgh remained in residence in Cross Wynd until 1912-13 when the names of all four female tenants in the street, including the widows, were crossed out. There was no record of replacements for these tenants so it is possible that the premises were vacated by the local authority as unfit to live in.

The number of widows occupying Wemyss Coal Company houses declined from 12 to 6 over the years 1905 -13. The number of female rent paying tenants increased during the same period from 16 to 26 [Tables 7.1. and 7.2.]. Several of these women were spinsters running shops, the post office and such like, while others were the wives and widows of miners. It is clear from the rent books that although widows, old and retired miners had a claim to free rent they were not automatically given the concession. Some paid rent while others did not. Each case or claim for concessions was evaluated and assessed on its own merit. If a widow or old miner had a

relative capable of paying rent they were expected to do so. There were several cases of grown children taking on the payment of parents' rents, especially sons paying the rent of their widowed mothers.

The situation had changed somewhat after the First World War as can be seen in the surviving rent books covering 1920 to 1946. These have been analysed for the years leading up to 1927. The situation regarding free property is complicated by two miners strikes that took place during these years. The national lockout of 1921 lasted from March to July and that of 1926 from May to November. No rent was paid during the weeks of the strikes as the men were out of work. Instead arrears in payments were added to the payments of succeeding weeks until all overdue amounts were paid. The non payment of rent and the accumulation of arrears complicates the process of tracing rent free accommodation. In some cases, for example the houses at Denbeath and Ward Street Methil the words "cash", "no rent" and "ill" were written in pencil beside the tenant's name. Other tenants were recorded in red ink. It's unclear what this means as these tenants were sometimes in arrears and sometimes "free". This designation probably refers to workers who did not pay rent regularly, by being in arrears or free tenants.

In the six months from September 1920 to March 1921 two tenants in Shore Head and another in Church Street West Wemyss paid no rent. Mrs George Peggie of Cross Wynd was still in residence and continued in rent free accommodation. In the Coaltown of Wemyss a tenant in Main Street and others in Old South row and St. Mary's Terrace paid no rent while ill for one month. In South Row two people paid no rent throughout while widow Qurifill who had paid rent for her house at Randolph Street East Wemyss moved to another house. Mrs. Turner of Den Houses paid no rent

throughout. In Brick Row and Rosie Cottages Methilhill one person paid no rent as did three tenants at Muiredge. In David Street and Victoria Road one person in each paid no rent, while in Wellesley road the tenants paid their own taxes and only paid rent to the Wemyss Coal Company.

In the rental year from September 1921 to September 1922 Mrs. Bernard, of Main Street West Wemyss, was free throughout the year. She remained in free accommodation in the same street until September 1927 and beyond. John Dryburgh died in 1924 and was replaced by a Mrs. James Dryburgh who paid 7/10 rent and 2/- tax per fortnight. She left the premises on 20 November 1925 as the house was uninhabitable. At Shorehead Mrs. P. Dingwall and James Fairfull were free tenants. The former was in residence in 1927 while the latter moved to another house in 1922. Mrs. John Stewart of Church St. West Wemyss described as a "war widow" paid her rent in a lump sum every month.

At Wemyss Tce. East Wemyss Mrs. Jas Fotheringham a "war widow" paid no rent throughout 1921/22, but in 1922/23 she paid £3:6:6 in a lump sum for the September to March rent and thereafter 19/10 and 2/8 per month. Another widow Mrs Bertram of Michael Place paid no rent in 1921/22. Mrs. Grainger paid rent until 22 November 1922 when the words "war widow, rent free" were pencilled in after her name. Mrs. Alex Craigie was relieved of arrears but paid 7/3 plus 2/2 a fortnight in rent. Mrs. George Turner, a war widow and tenant of Den Houses was recorded as a "no rent" occupier from September to March 1921 but paid rent from then on. At the Denbeath houses Mrs. Dunn of number 148 paid no rent, while a war widow living in number 90 paid 10/- and 3/11 per month. In 1922/23 her annual rent was £6:10:0. At Pirnie Street widow Henry Hill and at Cameron houses Mrs. Wilson, a war widow paid no rent. Mrs. Cameron however paid 9/4 plus

2/6 per fortnight from March 1922. Mrs. William Page was a free tenant at the new houses at Methilhill until 1927 and after. And finally, in 1927 Mrs. John Barrowman of number 60 Wellesley Road Buckhaven was given free rent coal and light for one year ending in December 1927.

The location of many of the houses recorded as rent free is worth attention. All of the houses occupied by widows, both rent free and rent paying and of old miners were sited in the villages of West Wemyss (Main Street, Cross Wynd, Cross and Broad Wynd) and Coaltown of Wemyss (Old and New South Rows and Barons Row). These were some of the oldest houses owned by the company. It cannot be categorically stated that it was company policy to house people entitled to free rent in a particular location and in the oldest houses of least ratable valuation. The necessity to pay rates on company housing could have been one reason for doing so however. If the tenants paid no rents they also paid no rates. The company was then liable for the full payment. They were therefore naturally inclined to house free tenants at the least expense to the company. It is also highly unlikely that women in one street or village were more prone to widowhood than others. And finally widows or female heads of households were never moved to new company houses, which were all allocated to men (presumably working miners and their families). The conclusion that certain houses were rent free properties could be drawn from the rent books. This can however be dismissed as when non-rent paying tenants moved (or were moved) to other houses the new tenants in all but a few cases paid rent. Hence the tenants were designated as entitled to relief from the payment of rent and not the properties as free houses.

Concessions in the form of rent free accommodation or reductions in rent were not only granted to widows at Wemyss, but also to elderly and infirm

miners. In 1906-07 James Peggie Sr. of Cross Wynd West Wemyss paid no rent, while three men living in the north side of New South Row were also occupying rent free houses. In Whilhelmina Street Buckhaven David Reid paid 8/- in the first fortnight, but thereafter the word "free" was pencilled across the rental column. In 1907-08 the words "free house" were written opposite Alex. Crombie's name and James Peggie Sr. continued to live rent free in West Wemyss. In 1909-10 R. Adamson of Back Row, Coaltown of Wemyss, occupied a rent free house valued at £2:12:0 per annum. Again the word "free" was written in the margin beside the tenant's name.

In the Coaltown of Wemyss Isaac Young and John Wilkie of Main Street paid no rent in 1921/22, 1922/23 and 1923/24. Isaac Young left his home in January 1924 and moved to number 4 Gothenburgh Tce.. He remained as a free tenant there until 1927. There were two other rent free tenants living in numbers 2 and 3 Gothenburgh Tce. Young's house in Coaltown was occupied by William Hampson from January 18 1924, paying 11/9 and 3/2 per fortnight. In 1921/22 another three men lived rent free at Lochhead Row, Coaltown. One of these moved house in August 1922. In Randolph St. the workers at Michael paid no rent while they were ill. In St. Mary's Tce., John Ross was a free tenant but his entry was crossed out on 13 March 1922 and the house left standing empty. Five men living at Bogrageach Toll, Percival Crossing and East Newton House were all free in 1921 and remained so until 1927 and beyond. Another four men at Wellesley road paid no rent.

In 1923/24 James Cleeland of Main Street West Wemyss was rent free from December 1923 to May 1924 but then moved to 26 Lochhead Row in Coaltown. He replaced another rent free tenant Harry Dewar. Albert Scarlett of 2 Gothenburgh Tce., paid no rent. He moved in April 1926 and was

replaced by a rent paying tenant David Baird (15/11 and 6/2 per fortnight). Charles Christie of number 3 also free was replaced by John Fitzsimon in June 1924. George Stewart of 1 Michael Place and Henry Dalrymple and Archibald Sharp of 25 and 26 Randolph Street were rent free throughout the years 1923-27.

The only rent book of the Fife Coal Company Ltd. available for consultation is that of 1911-12. In this volume records of the tenants' names, where they worked, the proprietor of the property, the fortnightly rent and taxes and payments for gas water and domestic coal were kept. Tenants paid 1d. for gas, 6d. for water and 6/- for 16cwt. of coal per fortnight and 1d. for it's hire.⁴⁶ It's unclear what exactly "hire" refers to but it may be the cost of transporting the coal from the pits to homes. In Balgreggie David Muir lived in a free house valued at £15 per annum and had free fire coal. In Fourth Street Denend James Black, a carter, occupied a rent free house worth 6/7 per fortnight. In Sixth Street John Hostie, another carter only paid 1d. per fortnight for his gas. Rent for his house would have been 6/7. In Sixteenth Street Denend, Alex. Shand had free accommodation until his death on 12 July 1911. Bartholemew Stevenson also had occupancy of a free house worth 8/8 per fortnight (8/- rent, 8d. tax, 1d. gas and 6d. water). Three rent free cottages were located in Seventeenth Street, the homes of John Campbell an electrician, Andrew B. Simpson a dispatcher and Richard Simpson a timekeeper. Payment for these houses would have been 9/8 per fortnight: 8/11 rent, 9d. tax, 1d. gas and 6d. water. There were no women recorded as tenants or heads of households and hence no details of how widows were catered for.

⁴⁶ SRO WRH CB 3/126: Fife Coal Company Rent Book for 1911-12.

According to the surviving rent book of the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company for the year 1933, only "company officials" were allocated rent free property.⁴⁷ In "Official Street" Lochgelly the houses had names such as "The Oaks", "Lamond View" and "Boarhead". Two "officials" houses at Station Road and two at Leid Road were also free. At Raith however only one of the occupants of company officials houses, John Gray of Raith Cottage was free. Two others at Binnie Ridge paid rent. At Dundonald the tenant of Dundonald House James M. Paul paid no rent while the occupant of "Office Cottage" Archibald Barrett paid 7/6 per week. Mrs. M. Gray of Woodside Dundonald, paid no rent for a house worth 10/6 per week. She was the only recorded female tenant whose rent was waived. There were sixteen other female heads of households in Lochgelly but they all paid rent varying from 3/5 to 6/6 per week. Two were in arrears of rent at the end of the rent year; one to the tune of 414/- and the other 124/6. There were two female tenants at Raith and another two at Dundonald. The two Raith ladies were also in arrears, in one case amounting to 846/6 (£42). The two women at Dundonald paid 7/5 rent a week.

It will be evident from the above description that there was an underlying principle of granting concession in rent to the needy. It will also be clear that the implementation of concessions varied widely. There were no hard and fast rules; the granting of concession, its level and duration were all at the discretion of the coal companies. That coal companies would look after the interests of their employees both in and outside of work was completely taken for granted in Fife's coal-mining communities and by the government. It will be demonstrated in the next section, that when the

⁴⁷ SRO WRH CB 2/167: Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company Rent Book 1933.

level of demand became too much to handle, coal companies withdrew some of their concessions to employees.

7. 6. War widows.

After the Great War of 1914-18 there were over 200 war widows in Fife Coal Company houses alone. In Fife as a whole there were 207 war widows in company free property, another 232 in privately rented accommodation but with the rent paid by the coal companies. 400 war widows received free house coal and another 68 got theirs at a reduced rate. These figures for Fife were higher than for Lanarkshire and the Lothians together.⁴⁸

On 12 December 1918 the Chairman of the Fife Coal company raised the issue of the housing of war widows at a meeting between the company and the Dunfermline District Committee of Fife. The company wished to know whether the local authority intended to take over the housing of the widows as the company needed the properties for "able bodied men".⁴⁹ The Clerk of the Committee wrote to the Local Government Board (LGB) on the same day asking had the government considered the issue of war widows occupying company housing and requesting guidance on the matter.⁵⁰ The response of the LGB was to consider it unreasonable and "not sound economically" to expect colliery companies to allow widows to remain in their houses when the houses were needed for working men. Had the

⁴⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1172: War widows housing; details presented in October 1919 to the LGB by the Coal-owners Association.

⁴⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: Miners houses in Fife ; occupancy of war widows.

⁵⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28.

number involved been lower "say, half a dozen or so" the Board would have prevailed upon the company to allow the ladies to remain. On the presumption that widowhood would last for life and thus that the widows would be a burden on coal companies until their deaths the LGB suggested in an internal memorandum that the best course of action was to evict the widows "gradually and as smoothly as possible".⁵¹

The issue did not surface again until May 1919. The local authority had not followed up the original enquiry. The LGB however felt that they could not let the issue drop "in view of the inflammable state of feeling as regards evictions and the provision of houses for ex-soldiers" that prevailed at the time.⁵² It was decided to have informal discussions with the Scottish Board of Health and the Ministry of Labour to see if they could help. By June it was felt that the temporary difficulty of the cost of keeping the war widows might be mitigated "when the widows are in a position to take in lodgers . .".⁵³ It was also suggested that disused army huts could be supplied to the local authority to provide temporary accommodation until more permanent structures were erected.⁵⁴

" . . . essentially a case to be met by the purchase of army huts unless the "lodger" solution was possible. The "huts" solution would be more practical from the point of view of the Local Authority if the erection of huts is to be regarded as part of the Local Authority's housing scheme".⁵⁵

⁵¹ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 8 Jan. 1919.

⁵² SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 29 May 1919.

⁵³ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 2 June 1919.

⁵⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 5 June 1919.

⁵⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 5 June 1919.

And later ;

"It might easily be possible to get more than one war widow into an army hut usually made into two houses, and companies who are presently at the expense on account of their accommodation, could possibly be persuaded to contribute something, especially as their houses would be set free for workers".⁵⁶

The LGB felt that some effort ought to be made to provide extra accommodation "in view of the position within the coal industry". On the question of rent the widows were to be charged, they stated that although "progress towards economic rent has been emphasised lately, this should not affect temporary housing".⁵⁷

In December 1919, a year after the issue was first raised, the LGB pointed out that the Scottish Board of Health had been given important powers and duties in relation to housing in the 1919 Housing Act. The LGB queried the action of the Board of Health and the local authority in putting the financial capabilities of possible tenants to the forefront, when ascertaining the housing needs of the district, as they were doing so in this case. The local authority was reluctant to take on the housing of war widows if they were not going to be able to pay the rent fixed for local authority property. It was suggested that perhaps something could be done under the "1d. a ton" scheme to provide for the welfare of coal miners levied by the Coal Industry Commission of 1919.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 24 Nov. 1919.

⁵⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 24 Nov. 1919.

⁵⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: LGB memorandum dated 5 Dec. 1919.

The Housing Committee of the Scottish Board of Health did not consider that they had any statutory powers to deal with war widows.

"The situation seems to be beyond effective action except through housing schemes under the 1919 Housing Act which may in time lead to the vacation of premises for which the widows can afford to pay rent. Even if the matter reaches an acute stage it will be difficult to do anything without making a specially favoured class of "miners' war widows".⁵⁹

The Board of health expressed the hope that public opinion would prevent the mine owners from acting until conditions were easier. However, there was no modification of the situation as far as the Fife Coal Company was concerned. Their difficulty was accentuated by the return of miners from military service and the need to accommodate them. Nonetheless it was felt by all concerned that eviction of the war widows would result in a grave industrial crisis.

War widows were entitled to a pension and it was hoped that this would help with the payment of rent. After the war what was termed an "alternative pension" could be granted to a returned soldier or sailor. This was based on pre-war earnings and the value of payments in kind such as the right to live in a free house.

"A man eligible for an alternative pension, whose former employers provided him with a house therefore would find the value of the accommodation reflected in the alternative pension".⁶⁰

In the case of a widow any right of residence which her husband had as part

⁵⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: Scottish Board of Health memorandum (undated)

⁶⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1172. 7255/28: Letter dated 31 March 1919 from the Ministry of Pensions to the Local Government Board.

of his pre-war remuneration also affected the amount of her pension.

The situation was slightly different in Fife in that rent was charged for company houses before and after the war and houses were only free to widows and other needy cases. Though there does appear to be some confusion in the correspondence on this issue of what exactly constituted rent free property. The impression given was that since rent was deducted from the miners' wages and hence no money changed hands directly between tenant and landlord, houses were somehow regarded as part of the "wage packet" and thereby presumed to be "free". The follow on from this was that coal companies only got value for the "free" houses if they got a return in the form of the tenants' labour. Tenants therefore had to be workers and not dependents.

The fact that the pre-war rent would not have been an "economic rent" was likely to have been taken into consideration in granting "alternative pensions" to the Fife war widows. The Ministry of Pensions was at pains to point out throughout 1919 that they had no funds to assist war widows pay rent in either coal company or local authority housing.

In June 1919 the President of the LGB was asked whether arrangements were to be made to place huts at the disposal of the local authority for a temporary housing scheme to meet the requirements of demobilised service men and war widows. The cost of these huts was to be regarded as part of the local housing scheme and the regulations against the erection of wooden houses were to be suspended for the time being.⁶¹ Arrangements

⁶¹ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: Ministry of Munitions memorandum to the LGB dated 5 June 1919.

were made with the Disposal Board of the Ministry of Munitions "whereby opportunities will be given to Local Authorities to purchase huts which may be surplus to requirements". The LGB was prepared to regard the provision of these army huts as part of the local housing scheme.

In October 1919 the Ministry of Pensions was asked to offer suggestions as to how war widows occupying new houses under a local authority scheme and unable to pay the rent fixed by the local authority could receive assistance.⁶² The Ministry regretted that it had no observations to offer. The LGB then approached the Coal-owners Association for Scotland in order to ascertain the scale of the problem throughout Scotland.⁶³ The response from the Coal-owners is given in Table 7.2. There the correspondence on the subject closed.

Although the information available on the subject of the housing of war widows in Fife is incomplete, it does bring to light several interesting issues. It is clear from these documents that all parties; the LGB, the local authority, the Scottish Board of Health, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health as well as the Fife Coal Company, were reluctant to handle this sensitive issue. The Fife Coal Company evidently felt that accommodating the dependents of war heroes was not their responsibility but that of the government. The widows' husbands had died in the service of their country and not while working for the coal company. The issue was raised by the company very soon after the war ended on 11 November 1918. The meeting at which war widows were first mentioned took place in December

⁶² SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: Letter dated 2 Oct. 1919 from the Scottish Board of Health to the Ministry of Pensions.

⁶³ SRO WRH DD6/1172, 7255/28: Letter dated 17 Nov. 1919 from the LGB to the Under Secretary for Scotland, Scottish Office.

of that year. The company was evidently prepared to demand prompt action whereas the local authority was caught completely unaware and without any central government guide-lines on how to proceed. As far as the company was concerned the scale of the free accommodation necessary in this case mitigated against their providing the widows with homes. The local authority was equally reluctant to take responsibility for the widows as they too were not guaranteed a return for their housing investment.

7. 7. Gradual withdrawal of concessions.

Besides the treatment of war widows there are other indications of a gradual change in coal company policy towards concessions to the needy. Evidence is contained in the Blairenbathie Lease referred to in Chapter 4⁶⁴ and in the granting of either free or reduced rate firecoal.⁶⁵ In the case of the mineral lease fourteen houses at Main Street, Keltyhead were returned to the mineral and land proprietor upon expiry of the mineral lease in May 1930. From 28 May the tenants were to pay rent to the estate factor and not to the company. All of the houses were occupied by Fife Coal Company workers and rent was deducted from their weekly wage. In May 1930 five tenants were in arrears to the company, including John and David Houston of 8 Keltyhead whose arrears amounted to 518/3 in rent and 245/- in rates. There was however little prospect of recovering the £38:3:3 owed to the company as both men were approaching ninety years of age. Mr. J. Andrews, cashier to the Fife Coal Company stated in a letter to the company secretary Mr. William Walker that he understood that several applications for relief

⁶⁴ SRO WRH CB 3/157.

⁶⁵ SRO WRH CB7 5/40: Statistics file on miners housing 1920 and CB7 5/40 and 42 Workers' coal supply 1941.

of rent had been made to the company by the brothers, but that no decision had been made.⁶⁶ The Houston brothers occupied a house of 2/9 weekly rent and rates. The other houses in the street commanded higher rents at 3/6 per week. In a previous letter to the company secretary it was stated that application on behalf of the brothers had been made repeatedly to Mr. Charles Carlow, managing director of the company. In the words of Anderson "it would appear that the company has departed from granting such concessions". Mr. Walker's reply was to the effect that he was unaware of any such application but that meanwhile the men were taking free rent. He later stated that the occupancy "will no doubt have been considered in the same way as other cases". This was the final word on the subject. The company however was not in a position to enforce repayment of the rent as the houses were no longer its concern and the men no longer in its employ. We do not know how the new landlord, Moray Estates Development Corporation handled the situation. The new proprietor was under no social or moral obligation to these men. Whatever the outcome, the Fife Coal Company's attitude to granting free property had evidently changed since the First World War. By 1930 the company was reluctant to grant any concession in rent or property while the tenants still felt entitled to them.

The evidence concerning firecoal dates from 1941. When Scottish coal companies were requested by the Coal-owners Association of Scotland to detail the extent of the provision of firecoal to widows of ex-employees and to employees, fifty replied. Of these 25 supplied coal to widows at reduced rates; 33 supplied coal to employees who were not heads of households, but who supported households; 37 stated that there was no differentiation in

⁶⁶ SRO WRH CB 3/157; Letter dated 6 June 1930 from J. Anderson Cowdenbeath, to William Walker Secretary of the Fife Coal Company Ltd.

terms of prices for firecoal between colliery-owned and other houses (the other 13 companies owned no houses and did not supply coal to employees); 2 undertakings stated that there was no differentiation between the prices charged to dependents as against ordinary workers, while one of these admitted that widows were charged slightly higher rates and in the other case slightly lower.

The breakdown of the responses was as follows:

- (i) Supplied only if father is dead or unable to work;
- (ii) Only every alternate ton supplied at workers' rates;
- (iii) The merits of individual cases are carefully considered, provided the a son is working in the pit;
- (iv) Supplies to widows limited to two years;
- (v) Supplied to the eldest son in a family where the father is deceased;
- (vi) Widows not supplied unless a son or daughter is employed by the company;
- (vii) Supplied to a son employed by the company if he is the only support of a widowed mother;
- (viii) Widows living in non-company property only supplied if an employee also resides in the house;
- (ix) Widows supplied only if they have sons or lodgers working in the mine;
- (x) Widows of employees who have met with a fatal accident supplied;
- (xi) Widows supplied only if the family is young and has no income;
- (xii) Supporters of householders are always subject to the consideration of management;
- (xiii) Prices to widows and retired employees differ in accordance with the circumstances at the time of widowhood and of the retired employee.

The response from Fordell Colliery was that widows of ex-employees were not supplied with firecoal and that relatively few workers bought firecoal at reduced rates. In the cases of those who did, it made no difference whether they lived in a company house or not.⁶⁷ At Balgonie no widows of ex-employees were in receipt of firecoal at workers' rates. There were however a number of employees who were the main support of households who did receive firecoal at workers' rates. As far as the Balgonie Coal Company was concerned the merits of individual cases were carefully considered. However the company believed it desirable to continue the practice, both in the interest of the company and the welfare of the men, especially those who worked in wet conditions.⁶⁸

The responses from the Wemyss Coal Company and the Fife Coal Company were entirely different. At Wemyss firecoal was supplied at workers' rates to retired miners and their widows. There was generally no difficulty in these cases as the retired miners would have worked for the company for a long time. In instances where the period of service had been short, the company consider whether a son or daughter was in its employ. Firecoal at reduced rates was also granted to widows of ex-employees, other than widows of ex-retired miners, if the family was young or with no income. In cases however where members of the family were working outwith the company, their income was taken into consideration.⁶⁹ The Fife Coal

⁶⁷ SRO WRH CB7 5/42.

⁶⁸ SRO WRH CB7 5/42: Letter dated 9 January 1941 from Balgonie Coal Company, Markinch, Fife, to Robert Baird in Glasgow, Secretary to the Coal-owners Association.

⁶⁹ SRO WRH CB7 5/42: Letter dated 7 January 1941 from the Fife Coal Company to the Coal-owners Association.

Company supplied 36 widows with firecoal at workers' rates and 107 members of households who were not the head of the family. They also had a "concession" rate which was higher than miners' firecoal prices but lower than the sale price. The "concession" rate was adjusted from time to time and some of the widows paid this rate, while others paid the workers' rate, depending on the circumstances at the time of widowhood. The same applied to retired miners.⁷⁰

The firecoal records are interesting because they highlight residual elements of patronage while also indicating that coal companies considered carefully every concession to their employees. In a highly competitive industry every penny counted to the extent that by 1914 some coal companies no longer granted any concessions. The consideration of the households other circumstances, i.e. whether members did not work for the company suggests that companies were looking for excuses not to give the firecoal at reduced rates and that the criteria for award had become stricter. Only at Wemyss could it be said that paternalism was still thriving in 1941. There any connection with the coal company entitled people to firecoal at reduced rates.

7. 8. Conclusion

The provision of rent free accommodation in Fife's coal-mining communities was a hangover from the social relations that prevailed in pre-industrial Scotland. The system survived so long as the scale of the provision was small enough to allow the companies to carry their losses. Circumstances however, gradually changed in the aftermath of the First

⁷⁰ SRO WRH CB7 5/42: Reply to circular from Charles Augustus Carlow.

World War. Fife coal owners could not carry the weight of the war's destruction. They were willing to grant some concession; waive arrears, pay for domestic fuel, lighting and water, but they were not willing to lose investment in real property. The First World War allowed the process of disintegration of relations between the coal owners and colliers to gain momentum. So long as the system worked it was of mutual benefit to both employers and employees.

In the aftermath of the War company housing was certainly perceived by coal-owners as of benefit to the workers only. They had a home so long as they worked for the company. They were allowed to remain in their houses during illness, lockouts and strikes and were not expected to pay rent while out of work. The arrears were added to later payments. Substantial arrears were inevitably built up and the coal-owners had no choice but to tolerate these. Unless they increased wages they could not expect their workers to repay all they owed. In 1933 the occupiers of Fife Coal Company houses were in arrears for about £40,000 and the company found it difficult to obtain payment; it was stated that "the position is likely to continue while the indebtedness will rather be increased than otherwise".⁷¹ According to the adjusting statements at the end of the financial years 1925, 1926 and 1927, free rent and taxes cost the Wemyss Coal Company £1363:4:0, £1455:7:11 and £2974:13:0 respectively. This was a substantial commitment on the part of coal companies, especially when the return in terms of a stable and disciplinary workforce was no longer guaranteed. In the Report of the 1925 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry it was stated that none of the coal company houses built in the years 1901-14 and 1915-24 in Fifeshire,

⁷¹ SRO WRH CB 3/164. Letter dated 5 July 1933 from Wm. Walker, Secretary Fife Coal Company Ltd. to Messrs. J and G Wills, Solicitors, Kinross.

Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and the Lothians were rent free properties. During the years 1901-14, 1915-24 2687 and 532 houses respectively were erected in Fife coal-mining communities [Tables 7.4. and 7.5]

Housing was a long term capital investment and tied housing particularly so. Financial return was often intangible, at best irregular and at worst negligible. Houses were a drain on company resources since both the stock and the tenants needed constant attention. It was necessary to commission architects and building contractors to design and erect the houses and thereafter to employ staff to service and manage the properties. Standards had to be maintained. Houses and access roads needed constant servicing and upkeep. Records had to be kept, rent had to be deducted from wages or a factor employed as rent collector. Payment of rates and taxes on property was required, while the welfare needs of employees and their families had to be catered for. Most companies subsidised their employees in one form or another; by providing cheap domestic fuel, catering for the needs of the widowed, retired or ill and by tolerating arrears in rent. Housing was a constant drain on company resources in terms of both direct financial investment and of manpower and therefore was an obvious target for curtailment in the competitive environment of the twentieth century. The reaction against the housing of war widows is an indication of the pressure on housing in the post war years.

Colliers were entirely dependent upon coal companies for concession. They had no given right to tenure of company houses, to reductions in rent or to free coal. The granting of concessions was completely at the whim of the coal companies. Collier vulnerability and dependence in the relationship gave coal companies considerable power over their employees. The power of the coal owners enabled them to grant and withdraw concessions at their

own discretion. Their right to do so placed their employees at a disadvantage. Social control was enacted for the benefit of the enterprise. As soon as concessions began to influence profitability significantly they were withdrawn. Nevertheless, it seems that so long as concession were granted coal miners were content to accept them on the coal-owners' terms, indeed they regarded concessions as customary benefits associated with their profession. Their tacit acceptance of the relationship controlled by the coal-owners supported the prevailing social order.

Patronage did not end suddenly in Fife. It will be clear from all of the above that the withdrawal of concession was a gradual process; it happened faster at some coal companies than others. The rate of change again appears to have depended upon inherited traditions, the outlook of management and the extent to which the companies could afford to grant concessions. Tension existed between the demands of capital and the legacy of paternalism and deference.

Table 7.1 . Women paying rent for Wemyss Coal Company houses at West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Methil & Buckhaven.

1905-1913		1920-27	
<i>Rental Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Rental Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1905-06	16	1920-21	29
1906-07	20	1921-22	59
1907-08	23	1922-23	77
1908-09	22	1923-24	74
1909-10	23	1924-25	94
1910-11	30	1925-26	94
1911-12	27	1926-27	77
1912-13	26		

Source: Wemyss Coal Company rent books, 1905-13, 1920-27: SRO WRH CB 1/916 & CB1/917.

Table 7.2. Number of known widows (including war widows) occupying Wemyss Coal Company houses at West Wemyss, East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss, Methil & Buckhaven.

1905-13		1920-27	
<i>Rental Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Rental Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1905-06	6	1920-21	7
1906-07	5	1921-22	8
1907-08	4	1922-23	1
1908-09	6	1923-24	?
1909-10	7	1924-25	?
1910-11	7	1925-26	?
1911-12	4	1926-27	?
1912-13	2		

Source: SRO WRH CB 1/916 & CB 1/917: Wemyss Coal Company rent books, 1905-13, 1920-27.

Table 7.3. War Widows 1919

	<u>Lanark</u>	<u>Fife</u>	<u>The Lothians</u>
No. of war widows residing in rent-free company houses	118	207	46
No. of war widows not residing in company houses, but rent paid by coal company	48	232	10
No. of widows receiving free coal	150	400	62
No. of widows in company houses getting coal at reduced rate	44	68	24

Source: SRO WRH DD6/1172: Coal-owners Association of Scotland.

**Table 7.4 . Houses built between 1901 and 1914:
number and rent at 30 January 1924.**

<i>Weekly Rent</i>	<i>Lanark</i>	<i>Ayr</i>	<i>Fife</i>	<i>Lothians</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
Free					
1/-	7				7
1/6		1	3		4
2/-		31			31
2/6	8	73	4	76	161
3/-	55	292	15	157	519
3/6	149	188	93	118	548
4/-	147	159	80	326	718
4/6	167	67	491	389	1114
5/-	155	66	895	45	1161
5/6	635	53	558	77	1323
6/-	280	16	204	11	511
6/6	162	15	150	13	340
7/-	24	29	81	53	187
7/6	48	3	2		53
8/-			105		105
8/6	41		3	2	46
9/-	26		1	1	28
9/6	5				5
10/-	22		2		24
10/6					
11/-				4	4
11/6	1				1
12/-	6				6
12/6	1				1
13/-					
13/6	1				1
14/-					
14/6					
15/-	1				1
15/6					
16/-					
17/-					
18/-					
19/-					
20/-					
21/-					
22/-					
23/-	1				1
	1942	993	2687	1272	6894

Source : SRO WRH CB 7/5/4

**Table 7.5. Houses built between 1914 and 1924:
number and rent at 30 January 1924.**

<i>Weekly Rent</i>	<i>Lanark</i>	<i>Ayr</i>	<i>Fife</i>	<i>Lothians</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
Free					
1/-					
1/6				70	70
2/-	14	4		12	30
2/6	12	6		5	23
3/-	378	1		2	381
3/6	20	19		70	109
4/-	12	70		67	149
4/6	10	40	14	32	96
5/-	93	253	26	46	418
5/6	21	37	87	31	176
6/-	70	73	102	7	252
6/6	87	30	2	15	134
7/-	30	40	72	8	150
7/6	91	14	21	11	137
8/-	37	39	153	5	234
8/6	61	14		34	109
9/-	84		3	9	96
9/6	32		7		39
10/-	62	5	44	2	113
10/6	8			3	11
11/-	35	1		1	37
11/6	10			29	39
12/-	6			3	9
12/6	1				1
13/6	4	1		1	6
14/-				1	1
20/-	1				1
22/-			1		1
Total	1179	647	532	464	2822

Source: SRO WRH CB 7/5/41

Table 7.6. Fife Coal Company Houses 1908.

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Accommodation</i>
Lumphinnans	
Zetland Place	2 rooms, water outside, WC, cellar, boiler
Zetland Place	2 rooms, water outside, WC, cellar, boiler
Hill of Beath	
West Row	2 rooms, attic, scullery, outside dry closet,
West Row	2 rooms, scullery, outside dry closet
Main Street	1 room, scullery, WC
Main Street	2 rooms, scullery, WC
Kelty	
Church Row	3 rooms, outside WC
Baxters Row	1 room
Croall Place	3 rooms, scullery, outside WC
Old Cantsdam	3 rooms, WC between three tenants.
Ashfield	2 rooms, WC
Pleasance	2 rooms, WC between 2 tenants
Pleasance	2 rooms, WC between 2 tenants
Pleasance	2 rooms, WC between 2 tenants.
Blairadam	
Grievesland (new houses)	3 rooms, scullery.
Church Row	2 rooms.
Clayhole	2 rooms.
Kinnaird	1 room.
Lochore	
Centre Caravan	2 rooms, 2 closets between them.
Hynds	1 room
Hynds	3 rooms
Steading	3 rooms
Montrose St. (new houses)	2 rooms, scullery, WC (ground floor)
Montrose St. (new houses)	3 rooms, scullery, WC (upstairs).

Lassodie Mill

Upper Oakfield	2 rooms, WC between three tenants.
Upper Oakfield	3 rooms, WC between three tenants.
Cantsdam (used as a stable)	2 rooms, WC outside

Cowdenbeath

Union Street	2 rooms, scullery.
High St. (Diamond Row)	2 rooms
Bridge Street	1 room
Bridge Street	2 rooms
Hall Street	2 rooms, scullery
Foulford Place	2 rooms, scullery
Foulford Place	2 rooms, attic, scullery.

Source: SRO WRH DD 6/1170

Part III

Review and Introduction

Paternalism was fostered by Fife coal-owners as a means of maintaining and reproducing their workforce. Deference arose from the colliers' dependence upon coal companies for all of their social and welfare requirements. The relationship proved successful in Fife because of the history of the industry in the county; in particular the legacy of pre-industrial relations, the long history of coal extraction in the area, the relative isolation and self-sufficiency of many of the communities, the sense of loyalty to fellow workers due to the nature of the work, and the bond with the colliery, fostered by resident coal-owners.

Part II considered social relations in Fife based upon nineteenth century paternalism. Chapter 5 provided the operational definitions of paternalism and deference, community, power and social relations. The function of the chapter was to indicate that all social relations are power relations. Chapters 6 and 7 suggested how paternalism was translated into power, and thereby social control in Fife, and how deference equalled dependence and vulnerability. Chapter 6 presented evidence of paternalism in Fife. The extent to which the indigenous social relations were adopted by new late nineteenth century coal companies was also outlined. The theme was continued in Chapter 7, but, there the relationship was examined from the point of view of the colliers. Their vulnerability in relation to tenure of company housing was highlighted. The chapter also expanded upon the manifestations of paternalism and deference and considered concessions to the needy. Concessions in rent were never a right but rather at the

discretion of the coal-owner. Individuals had to apply and be granted free or reduced rent and when considering an application the coal-owner took into account the individual's family circumstances and the needs of the company. The inherent weaknesses in the relationship were also introduced. Pressures to withdraw or reduce concessions in rent reflected the economic pressures upon the coal industry at the time. It was demonstrated in relation to war widows that coal companies were willing to grant concession in rent or free accommodation only so long as this did not interfere with the productivity of the mine. When able bodied men, needed in the mines after World War I, required homes, Fife coal-owners turned to the local authority to house the war widows.

Part III elaborates upon the weaknesses and gradual modification and changes to the relationship between Fife coal-owners and colliers. It will be explained that while Scottish coal-owners began to feel pressure on their financial resources and curtailed investment in housing, demands for better quality housing and improvement in living conditions arose from within the coal-mining communities themselves. Throughout the period under review industrial relations between Scottish coal-owners and miners deteriorated steadily. Housing was an important cause of dissatisfaction. While in the middle of the nineteenth century miners and owners often worked together for mutual benefit, by the early twentieth century they were at loggerheads over wages, hours, working conditions as well as housing.

Chapter 8

From deference to antagonism; agitation for an inquiry into housing conditions in coal-mining communities.

"You must forgive us for being a little impatient. We have all lived under these conditions."¹

"I think everyone of us has lived under these conditions, so we know them all and feel them."²

8. 1. Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century social relations between coal-owners and miners within Scottish coal-mining communities deteriorated gradually from a position of deference to one of antagonism. Housing was an important factor in this change. Provision and consumption of workers' housing were important elements in labour and class relations. Living conditions and the standard of accommodation provided for "the working class" became the concern of the general public and the government largely through fear of contagious disease emanating from slum housing. Change in social relations, from a position of deference to one of antagonism, did not happen overnight, but was rather a gradual result of pressure from several sources.

¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170:Mr. Robert Smillie (Lanarkshire) to Lord Pentland, Secretary of State for Scotland, during meeting with a deputation from the Scottish Miners' Federation, 26 April 1911.

² SRO WRH DD6/1170: Mr. Adamson, (Fifeshire) to Lord Pentland, Secretary of State for Scotland, during meeting with a deputation from the Scottish Miners' Federation, 26 April 1911.

There were a number of interrelated changes in social relations in Scottish coal-mining communities from the 1870s onwards. First, developments within the coal-mining industry itself. These were twofold; economic trends in the inland and overseas market and developments in the financing and management of private enterprise. Second, developments in the organisation of labour. The rise of the trade union movement and demands for better wages and living conditions had a profound effect upon labour relations. Third, developments in housing provision; the increase in the mining workforce led to greater and greater demand for living accommodation. Private companies were under pressure, as a result of trade competition and demands from investors, to charge economic rents instead of low rent and free housing. Finally, a new factor emerged in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century which affected housing, private enterprise and labour alike. This was intervention from the government, in both the housing market and the industrial economy. Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century the government had become increasingly involved in both housing and industrial development. Intervention in the housing market and legislation to improve standards of construction and facilities affected both the provision of coal company housing and labour relations.

In the early years of the twentieth century Labour M.P.s and the miners' union pressed for better standards of living accommodation in mining communities. This pressure and parliamentary lobbying brought the situation to the notice of the government. The greatest pressure was applied between the years 1909 and 1911. Members of the Scottish Miners Federation and M.P.s from mining districts repeatedly waited upon the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Lord Advocate at Edinburgh and London. Each delegation pressed for an independent enquiry and each provided more and

more evidence in support of the miners' cause. An independent enquiry, the Royal Commission on the housing of the working class in Scotland, was finally commissioned in 1912. Fife coal communities were inspected in 1913. Because of the war the Commission did not report until 1917. The majority report placed responsibility for housing the working class squarely in the lap of the government. This report, coupled with industrial agitation and unrest during the war finally forced the government's hand. The government acted quickly and the ensuing legislation, the Housing Act of 1919 acknowledged, for the first time, the State's obligation to provide adequate housing accommodation for workers. The path was then open for the provision of subsidies to local authorities to erect working class houses. Provision for these was enacted in the 1919, 1921 and 1923 Housing Acts.

This chapter traces the agitation for improvement in living standards and demands for an independent enquiry into conditions in coal-mining communities. It outlines the actions of the miners in pressing for an independent enquiry and the reaction of government and coal-owners.

8.2. Towards an independent enquiry; agitation by miners and their supporters.

Housing was an issue in labour relations as early as the 1830s. At Colliershall in Lanarkshire in 1837 members of a local union were "cleared" from pit houses to make way for labourers and their families with no affiliation to a union.³ During strike action in Wishaw in Lanarkshire in 1856 hundreds of miners and their families were threatened with eviction from company

³ Arnot, R.P. (1955) *A History of the Scottish Miners*, George Allen and Unwin, London, p. 16.

housing.⁴ Eviction from tied housing and the threat of eviction were used by Scottish coal-owners as a means of disciplining the workforce and of ridding it of undesirable elements up to and during the national strike of 1926 (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6. for details on Fife).. Housing however was not central to Scottish union activity until the end of the nineteenth century. It was an item on the agenda of a national conference of British miners at Leeds in 1863, among a wide range of other topics including compensation for accidents, contracts, truck, education, improvements to inspection, ventilation, hours of work for boys, strikes and lockouts.⁵ There were however only three Scottish delegates at the conference which is an indication of the lack of cohesion of the Scottish union at the time.

From the 1840s to the 1890s most of the pressure exerted by the miners' union was for better wages, shorter working hours and true weighing of output. By the 1890s however housing and living conditions had attained greater significance. Coal miners had begun to question tenure of their homes and the standard of accommodation provided by their employers. Miners regarded the provision of a home as part of the hiring contract and therefore their natural entitlement. Once coal-owners charged rent for their property and moved towards the imposition of an economic rent, miners began to question their relationship with their employers/landlords. In long established paternalistic firms in particular, the charging of rent cut across the reciprocal obligation in the owner-miner relationship that was fostered for generations. Scottish colliers gradually came to the conclusion that if they paid an economic rent they ought to have greater security of tenure

⁴ Arnot. R.P., *Op, cit.* p. 43.

⁵ First Conference of the National Association of Coal, Lime & Ironstone Miners of Great Britain, held at Leeds in 1863.

and not the prevailing tenancy at the will of the employer, whereby a collier could be ejected from his home at a fortnights' notice. The colliers fundamental objection was to the payment of any rent at all. They held on to the belief that they were entitled to a company house, with little or no rent, for as long as possible. The problem was there were not enough company houses available.

The issue of the occupancy of company houses became a source of conflict between the miners and the coal-owners. In times of trade dispute, even if not the immediate cause of the conflict, it was obvious that employers could and would use tenancy at will and the threat of eviction as a means of disciplining the workers. Such action was all the more effective when houses were in short supply.

In the light of deteriorating relations with the coal-owners, the miners realised that coal companies were unlikely to raise standards. The Scottish Miners Federation focused its attention upon the appointment of an independent enquiry into living conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities. The Federation therefore turned to central government to agitate for statutory regulation to guarantee improvements in living conditions.

Once the miners' union was sufficiently representative and united to become involved in local politics, it began to lobby for improvements by political means as well as by the threat of strike action. From 1892 onwards representatives of the miners and Labour M.P.s repeatedly waited upon the Secretary of State for Scotland. Issues raised at these meetings ranged from working conditions to rent and housing conditions.

8. 2. 1. *First deputation, 1892.*

In March 1892 representatives of Lanarkshire miners were in London to discuss the Mines Act. While there they sought a meeting with the Secretary for Scotland and the Lord Advocate to bring to their attention the "hardships to which miners are exposed by reason of the tenure of their dwelling houses."⁶ The meeting took place on Friday 18 March 1892, when the Secretary for Scotland Lord Lothian, and the Lord Advocate, met representatives of Scottish Miners for the first time. The two Lanarkshire miners were accompanied by several Scottish Members of Parliament. The men urged changes in the tenure of miners cottages as miners had no security of tenure. No notice to quit was ever necessary before a miner was turned out of his house.⁷ A statutory interval was however necessary before the miner could actually be evicted. The miners protested that in their experience when miners were turned out of their homes it was never in order to admit other tenants, but rather to exercise pressure in trade dispute. Tenancy was at the will of the employer and, according to the deputation, miners were frequently turned out of their homes in consequence of "some trivial circumstance and compelled to accept reductions in working prices as no other houses were available".⁸ They further stated that during trade disputes tenancy of company housing was used as a cover to "compel miners to succumb and accept settlements injurious to their interests, that

⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Mr. Small and Mr. Smillie of Larkhall met the Secretary of State and the Lord Advocate to request consideration of the tenure of miners' houses, the Weights and Measures Act of 1889 and the Truck (Amendment) Act of 1887.

⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, Saturday 19 March 1892.

⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman* Saturday 19 March 1892.

for the dread of eviction would never have been entertained."⁹

The Scottish media attributed greater importance to the meeting than the Civil Service. Details such as the attendance of Scottish M.P.s, and the reasons for the desired change in notice to quit from two weeks to three months, were recorded in *The Scotsman* newspaper and not in the Scottish Office notes of the meeting. This is in stark contrast to the detailed notes kept at later deputations and illustrates the lack of importance attributed to the miners and their concerns at the time.

The primary concern of the deputation was the control over Scottish miners vested in coal-owners through the lack of tenure of company property. The miners' representatives did not however suggest that they should live in other property, but rather that they should have greater freedom and rights of tenure in company housing. The same applied to the other issues raised by the deputation; tool sharpening and hutch weight. The miners did not suggest an end of coal company control of either, but rather that the system should be fairly administered. At that time they were not advocating radical change but rather the continuation of existing arrangements with administrative alterations.

Neither the Secretary for Scotland nor the Lord Advocate made any promises to the deputation and the government took no action on the tenure of company housing until a bill was introduced to Parliament in 1898. The bill made provision with respect to the tenure of houses of workmen in specific industries.

⁹SRO WRH DD6/1170:Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, Saturday, 19 March 1892.

"Where any person employed in a coal mine, iron or steel work, or in the service of a railway company, occupies a house belonging to the owner of the mine, iron and steel work, or to the railway company respectively, either as a tenant or in consideration of his service, the occupation shall not be terminated until after three months notice by either party or by mutual consent."¹⁰

For the trade union movement delay in eviction was the first step towards breaking the control of the coal-owners over workers housing.

8. 2. 2. *Second and third deputations, 1909.*

From the turn of the twentieth century living conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities were central to trade union agitation. The subject received a great deal of attention at the annual conference of the Scottish Miners Federation on 16 January 1909.¹¹ On the 19 January the Secretary for Scotland, the Rt. Hon. John Sinclair M.P. received a deputation of Scottish miners at the Scottish Office, Edinburgh. The deputation consisted of the executive committee of the Scottish Miners Federation. This time representatives of the miners of Fifeshire, Ayrshire, West Lothian, Clackmannanshire and Stirlingshire as well as Lanarkshire were included.¹² This indicates that miners' housing had become a national issue for all

¹⁰ Tenure of Workmens' Houses Bill 1898, 61 Vict. Bill 97.

¹¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *Glasgow Herald*, 16 January 1909.

¹² SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 20 January 1909: The deputation included Mr. Robert Smillie, President of the Scottish Miners' Federation; Mr. David Gilmour, Mr John Robertson, Mr. James Murdoch, and Mr. James Tower (all from Lanarkshire); Mr. James Brown, (Ayrshire); Mr. William Adamson (Fifeshire); Mr. James Doonan, (West Lothian); Mr James Cook (Clackmannanshire); Mr. Hugh Murnin (Stirlingshire); and Mr. Brown, the miners' secretary.

members of the miners' union.

Conditions in miners' housing were topical as the Royal Commission on Mines was in sitting at the time. The Commission dealt with washing and bathing in collieries, but also received a considerable amount of evidence on miners' housing. The number of one roomed houses in Scottish mining villages received particular attention. Members of the Commission visited some Scottish mining villages and had been "scandalised" by the conditions they found. As a result they condemned provision of one roomed dwellings for entire families.

The deputation placed before the Secretary for Scotland the miners' view on accommodation provided for them. They urged that improvements were needed and pressed for the appointment of a committee of enquiry to ascertain facts regarding conditions in coal-mining communities. They further pressed that the enquiry should be conducted with the introduction of what they regarded as necessary legislation in view.¹³

The Secretary for Scotland expressed sympathy with the miners and undertook to make "all necessary inquiry into the alleged defects in the housing accommodation". Nonetheless he would not indicate the precise form such an enquiry would take.¹⁴

In April 1909 another deputation of miners had an interview at the Scottish Office with the Secretary for Scotland and the Lord Advocate. At this

¹³ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 20 January 1909.

¹⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 20 January 1909.

meeting Mr. Adamson, M.P. for West Fife, enumerated a catalogue of reforms which were needed to improve miners' houses. Once again the delegation received a promise that enquiries would be made.¹⁵

In Parliament two months later a question was raised as to whether or not these enquiries had commenced. On 14 June 1909 Mr. Beale, the Labour member for South Ayrshire, asked the Lord Advocate, Mr. Ure whether the Secretary for Scotland had initiated any enquiry relating to the "insufficient and unsatisfactory housing accommodation for miners in certain districts of Scotland". He further requested the Secretary for Scotland to take steps to ensure that in pending legislation adequate statutory provision should be made to deal with this "evil".¹⁶ Mr. Ure replied that the Local Government Board for Scotland had been requested by the Scottish Office to commission reports on housing conditions by the Medical Offices of the leading mining counties of Lanarkshire, Fifeshire and Ayrshire. No further action would be taken until these reports were to hand.¹⁷

8. 2. 3. Fourth and fifth deputations, 1911.

On 26 April 1911 yet another deputation from the Scottish Miners Federation waited upon the Secretary for Scotland at Whitehall.¹⁸ On this

¹⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170.

¹⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170, 7255/9: Notice of question dated 9 June 1909, to be asked in Parliament on 14 June 1909.

¹⁷ SRO WRH DD/1170: Response dated 11 June 1909, prepared by the LGB for Scotland.

¹⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170: The deputation comprised Mr. Robert Smillie (Lanarkshire), Mr. William Adamson, M.P. and Mr. Michael Lee (Fifeshire), Mr. D. Gilmour and Mr. J. Murdoch (Lanarkshire), Mr. J. Doonan (West

occasion the delegation gave the Secretary for Scotland evidence of the age of houses in mining villages. Many were then between 60 and 100 years old and were laid down upon the clay with no foundations. One apartment houses were once again condemned. Reference was made to the provision of better quality housing for the labouring classes in rural Ireland. Conditions there were said to have been "shameful", but no more so than in Scottish mining villages. The miners demanded similar treatment from the government. When asked would miners be willing to pay higher rents if the employers were forced to replace bad housing with high quality accommodation, the delegation's response was to the effect that some employers had already erected good housing in Fifeshire and in a small part of Lanarkshire. The colliers were perfectly willing to pay more for these. In regard to Fifeshire in particular, Mr. Adamson stated the following;

"The colliery owners at first did not make any charge for rental at all and did not charge for firecoal, but gradually it has become a commercial business, and the rental charged is rapidly approaching the rental charged by the private property owners. It has not quite reached that yet, but has been a bone of contention with us
 . . being a developing county, naturally we have a bigger number of new houses than in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. We have still some of the oldest villages
 . . Some of the old companies have been developing and they have had to add to their accommodation. Better a higher rent than old houses."¹⁹

Another issue alluded to at this meeting concerned the tenants of company housing. The miners' representatives stated that the standard of the houses

Lothian), and Mr. R. Brown, (Midlothian).

¹⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Notes on the Deputation from the Scottish Miners' Federation, received by the Secretary for Scotland at the Scottish Office, Whitehall, 26 April 1911.

had a good deal to do with the quality of people renting them; "where you have a better class of house you have a better class of person and citizen".²⁰ It was constantly being asserted by coal-owners and local government alike that conditions in mining villages were the fault of the tenants and not the house owners or local authorities. This statement was an attempt by the union to dispel this myth by suggesting that if the houses were of a higher quality the tenants would be more inclined to keep them so.

Comparisons were made with conditions in French and German mining villages. There too, shortages in housing in mining districts were a hindrance to labour recruitment and a cause of poor industrial relations. The response in the Ruhr however, was for the coal companies to undertake substantial building programmes. But, these workers houses erected by the companies had beautiful gardens, open squares and the streets were planted with trees. The houses were from three to four rooms, beautifully kept clean as no miner was allowed to go inside a house, or come out of the pit gate in his pit clothes.²¹

The miners requested Lord Pentland to forgive them their impatience but, they had all experienced and lived with the conditions they complained of.²² As far as they were concerned an independent enquiry and national legislation were the only solution.

²⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Notes on the Deputation received by the Secretary of State for Scotland, 26 April 1911.

²¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Mr. Robert Smillie to Lord Pentland, Secretary of State for Scotland, 26 April 1911.

²² SRO WRH DD6/1170 : Mr. Smillie and Mr. Adamson to Lord Pentland, 26 April 1911 (see quotations at the beginning of the chapter).

In their struggle for improvements to living standards the miners received support from within Parliament and from communities throughout Scotland. Labour M.P.s from Scotland repeatedly asked for a departmental enquiry into the housing conditions in Scottish mining districts and appealed to the Secretary for Scotland to take immediate action. Throughout 1911 at annual general meetings of the Young Scots Society support was pledged for Mr. T. H. Whitehouse M.P., in his parliamentary lobbying for an enquiry.²³

The miners federation continued their efforts. On 17 November 1911 yet another meeting took place between the union representatives and Lord Pentland. The deputation included all of the Scottish M.P.s sitting for mining districts.²⁴

"The mining village afforded a unique problem. It existed for one industry and the houses for the workers were frequently provided by the owners of the industry. Hence the standard of life was frequently lower than in the towns, where there was a widening influence of a diversity of industry."²⁵

Attention was once again drawn to the number of one apartment houses in

²³ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Public meeting of the Cambuslang Young Scots Society, 31 October 1911, with nearly 500 in attendance and a meeting of the Wishaw Young Scots Society, 1 Nov. 1911.

²⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170: The Deputation of 17 Nov. 1911 comprised Mr. Whitehouse, who acted as secretary to the miners'; Mr. Anderson; Mr. Murray MacDonald; Mr. Adamson; Mr. Acland Allen; Sir. W. Menzies and Mr. E. Watson.

²⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, Tuesday 21 November 1911; quotation from Mr. Whitehouse, M.P.

mining villages; sometimes built "back-to-back" without damp courses or sanitary arrangements. The miners justified their case for an enquiry by referring to the "extraordinary revelations" made in reports of the Medical Officers for Health which included details such as coals being stored under the bed in the kitchen and all washing, clothes drying, and daily living taking place in one room.²⁶

"In conclusion Mr. Whitehouse said that the appointment of a committee was essential in order to collate the data already available and consider what further legislation was necessary. The report of such a committee would reveal to the public the existing conditions and once these were realised there would be sufficient driving force for whatever steps were necessary to get rid of an intolerable evil".²⁷

Lord Pentland's response was to the effect that, although in sympathy with miners, the Scottish Office must give careful consideration before initiating a public enquiry as miners were not all housed to the same standard or by coal companies alone. It was noted that even in Fifeshire some houses were satisfactory and others wholly unsatisfactory. An enquiry therefore could not be confined to the housing of miners only, while a general enquiry into the housing of the working class in Scotland would delay reform.²⁸

Nevertheless, the Scottish office was anxious to do something. Steps were taken to encourage local authorities, through the Local Government Board,

²⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 21 Nov. 1911, Mr. Whitehouse to Lord Pentland.

²⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 21 Nov. 1911.

²⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Press cutting, *The Scotsman*, 21 Nov. 1911: Reply from the Secretary of Scotland.

to use their existing powers to improve conditions. The local authorities could also propose legislation which would increase their powers. If the local authorities were to take more action the Scottish office believed that the desired improvements in conditions would take place. Despite this, Lord Pentland's aim throughout was to persuade Scottish coal-owners that it was in their economic interest to improve the standard of their workers accommodation.

"It will be more in the interest of the employer to reduce the risks of disease and illness to minimise bad health and insanitary conditions all that I think will have a powerful effect in influencing the opinion of the employers and showing them the advantages to themselves to see that everybody is housed as they should be and so protect the health of the families of the individuals."²⁹

The miners remained sceptical. They were aware of the difficulties inherent in such action, not least the bias of county councillors and their tolerance of the situation, and the coal-owners' influence upon local government. Not only were there administrative difficulties as outlined in Chapter 3, but, many of the members of local authorities had vested interests in maintaining the status quo. That "interested" parties were members of local authorities was complained of in deputation by Scottish miners to the Secretary for Scotland in April 1911. The representatives of the Miners' Federation highlighted the fact that the average county councillor was brought up "side by side" with the housing conditions under investigation and some had interests in coal companies. The miners' representatives believed that such people were inclined to take conditions prevalent at the

²⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Notes on the Deputation from the Scottish Miners' Federation, on the subject of miners' housing, received by the Secretary for Scotland at Whitehall, 26 April 1911.

time as natural. Therefore any reports such councillors would make were likely to be coloured in favour of the coal-owners.

Attempts were made by the Miners' Federation to gain access to local government by putting candidates forward for local election but they were unsuccessful in gaining representation on County Councils. Miners' representatives were only successful at local elections in Lanarkshire. Town and Burgh Councils were equally made up of "interested parties". For example, between 1890 and 1940 in Cowdenbeath, a large mining town in West Fife and the headquarters of the Fife Coal Company which became a burgh in 1890, the town council had 13 provosts. The incumbents between 1890 and 1917 were all professional men with business interests; chairmen of the Cowdenbeath Coal Company, grocery shop owners, builders, boot and shoe businessmen and the like. The incumbent during the years 1917-21 was originally a miner but subsequently became the proprietor of a public house. His successor, provost from 1921 to 1927 was a full time miner who took a keen interest in the welfare of the mining community. The latter's successor, again a miner and one-time chairman of the Fife, Clackmannan and Kinross Miners Union, took an active interest in industrial and social issues. A similar situation existed at Lumphinnans in west Fife.³⁰ This example suggests that miners and their representatives did not gain access to local government until World War I and thereafter.

³⁰ Macintyre, S. (1980) *Little Moscows*, Croom Helm, London, p. 54.

8.3. Towards an independent enquiry; action taken by the Scottish Office and the coal-owners' response.

In response to pressure from the Miners' Federation in 1909, the Local Government Board commissioned reports on housing conditions in mining villages, from the County Medical Officers of Lanark, Ayr, Stirling and Fife. Apart from this some members of Local Government Board were "entirely at a loss what to do".³¹ They had reservations that the Miners Federation would not be satisfied with the medical officers reports. It was also concerned that the medical officers might feel compromised while the miners' union was likely to accuse them of bias.

"The report might have to comment on the action or inaction of the Local Authorities and it is certain that no Medical Officer can make a sufficiently independent statement. Nor . . . is it fair to ask him".³²

If the enquiry was to be a success the Board felt that it ought to be conducted with the knowledge and co-operation of both the Medical Officers and the Miners' Federation. Hence the Local Government Board would have preferred an immediate general independent enquiry to the commissioning of Medical Officers' reports. The Board was headed however by the Secretary for Scotland and he was proceeding with caution.

Despite the reservations of some of its members the Local Government Board prepared an enquiry schedule. The Board's Medical Inspector was instructed to communicate with the Medical Officers in the principal mining counties of Lanarkshire, Fifeshire, Stirlingshire, Dumbartonshire and Ayrshire and request particulars on the conditions in mining villages

³¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Internal LGB memorandum, 1909.

³² SRO WRH DD6/1170: Internal LGB memorandum, 1909.

within their jurisdiction. Reports were duly received from Dr. Dewar of Fife, Dr. Wilson of Lanark, Dr. M'Vail of Stirling and Dunbarton and Dr. Macdonald of Ayr.

Dr. T. F. Dewar, M.D. D.S.C., Medical Officer of Health for Fifeshire presented his report to the Local Government Board for Scotland in August 1909. The report which dealt with housing condition, overcrowding, sanitary facilities, access roads, rents and wages, was not published but reproduced in part in his annual report for 1909.³³ His report stated that while emphasis was necessarily laid upon hamlets and areas where the sanitary conditions were imperfect the great majority of the houses inhabited by miners in Fifeshire attained to a fair standard. The proportion of miners houses to which he could take serious exception was in the region of 8%-12%.³⁴

Dr. Wilson in his report on Lanarkshire stated that in the three districts of Lower, Middle and Upper Wards a considerable amount of the public health department's time was spent in dealing with conditions in mining villages. Dr. M'Vail of Stirlingshire and Dumbartonshire pointed out that;

" in ordinary colliery villages District Committees have no sufficiently direct powers to compel daily refuse removal, nor the construction and maintenance of proper roadways and footpaths, nor the provision of indoor water supply, nor the erection of coal houses or wash houses."³⁵

³³ 1909, Cd. 5288 Local Government Board (Scotland), Fifteenth Annual Report, XL 447.

³⁴ 1909 Cd. 5288, LGB Annual Report, Medical Inspectors Report XC.

³⁵SRO WRH DD6/1170

Although progress was being made in these areas he emphasised that changes in legislation permitting improvement were needed immediately. Dr. Macdonald's report on Ayrshire raised a different issue pertinent to housing condition; the lifespan of the mine. He regarded it as unreasonable to insist on costly alterations to property when the minerals were nearly exhausted. On the other hand he believed that when the mine was expected to continue in operation for a prolonged period, the coal companies should be compelled to provide proper housing with satisfactory sanitary arrangements.

In December 1910 similar reports were called for from Midlothian, Linlithgow, Haddington, Kinross and Clackmannan. As a result of all of these reports it became abundantly clear that legislative provisions for housing and health, especially in relation to sanitation, the institution of scavenging districts, responsibility for roads and pavements were insufficient to deal with the problems in coal-mining communities. Many of the coal-mining villages under investigation were under the jurisdiction of landward local authorities where existing legislation was not applicable (see Chapter 3).

As feared, the Scottish Miners Federation was not satisfied with the reports of the medical officers. Complaints were made that the reports were coloured to suit the county councillors who were "drawn from a different class to those who made their complaints".³⁶

Following receipt of the Medical Officers' Reports the Scottish Office sought

³⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170

further information by consulting each County Council and the coal-owners of Scotland. Local authorities were asked to furnish details on the application of housing acts in their areas and particularly in relation to mining villages. They were further requested to outline changes to the law they deemed necessary and to suggest, in view of the Medical Officers' statements, further powers they would desire. It was reported that Ayrshire considered the powers contained in the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 to be sufficient while other counties made preliminary suggestions for greater powers. In particular the County Council of Lanarkshire felt that the powers of dealing with slum areas should be extended to county authorities. This had been repeatedly urged by the County Council when the 1909 Housing Town Planning etc. Bill was before Parliament.³⁷

While all of this was taking place the Scottish Office conducted interviews with representatives of the coal-owners. The Secretary of State for Scotland was wary of the issue of responsibility and jurisdiction. Most of the houses in coal-mining districts were owned by the coal companies. Therefore their opinion of, and support for, any change in legislation had to be solicited. The gist of the responses they received was that the powers of dealing with slum areas should be extended to county authorities.

Throughout 1911 the Scottish Office gathered information from the coal-owners themselves. In February 1911 Lord Pentland met Charles Carlow, who had been managing director of the Fife Coal Company since its foundation in 1873, and who was a leading member of the Fife and

³⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Letter dated 17 February 1911 from Thomas Munro, County Clerk for Lanarkshire to the LGB.

Clackmannan Coal-owners Association.³⁸ Carlow was one of the most powerful and influential coal-owners of Scotland. In 1911 there were 26,189 people employed in the coal-mining industry in Fife. Of these 14,122 were employed by the Fife Coal Company. It was the biggest coal company employer in Fife and the owner of the greatest number of houses. There were 3,490 houses under its control; 2936 its outright property and 556 the property of the mineral proprietors.

At the meeting the men discussed the issue of miners' houses in general, while giving particular attention to the question of rent. The Wemyss and Bowhill Coal Companies were then to be contacted in an effort to obtain a consensus of opinion on measures to improve conditions in miners' houses. The coal-owners of Scotland provided Lord Pentland with a report on rents charged for company housing commissioned by them in 1899 with an appendix on rents paid for Fife Coal Company property in 1908.³⁹ The report showed a very low rate of increase between 1899 and 1908. Rent had been discussed at meetings held between the coal-owners and miners of Fife at Dunfermline in 1907 and 1908. Charles Carlow, as a dominant figure in the Coal-owners' Association, as well as the employer of the largest number of miners in Fife, also sent a personal memorandum giving his views on the provision of company housing and resulting problems.⁴⁰

³⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170: On 7 February 1911, Mr. Charles Carlow (Fife Coal Company) and Dr. Ross (Dunfermline) met the Secretary for Scotland and discussed the question of miners' housing.

³⁹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Fife and Clackmannan Coal-owners Association: Report by Committee of Coalmasters' Association in regard to House Rents paid by Miners' and the tenants share of taxes payable thereon.

⁴⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Mr. Charles Carlow, Managing Director of the Fife Coal Company Ltd., prepared at the suggestion of John Ross, Esq., LL.D. Dunfermline, on the question of housing accommodation

Dr. Ross, of the Dunfermline District Committee, was requested by the Scottish Office to act as mediator between the Local Government Board and Fife coal-owners. After reading Dr. Dewar's report of 1909, and as a result of his involvement in various discussions with the representatives of the coal-owners, he wrote the following report for Lord Pentland, on accommodation and rent in mining villages;

1."The houses are of various description. Those which are old and dilapidated are generally those pertaining to collieries which are well worn out, on which the owner is naturally unwilling to expend more money than is necessary to see out the duration of the lease. These houses as Dr. Dewar states, are comparatively few in number. At page 163 of his report he estimates the number of such houses as from eight to twelve per cent. Considering that he wrote the Report as the Medical Officer of Health and was from his office naturally anxious to see the condition of the houses improved, his estimate may be accepted as certainly not understating the number of houses to which exception may be taken.

2. A gradual improvement is taking place in the condition of the houses. it may be said generally that every new group of houses erected is better than those that have preceded. This shews a mutual desire on the part of the owners and occupiers, the one to provide suitable house accommodation, and the other to obtain such accommodation.

3. The question of house accommodation is a complex one. It must be governed in part by the habits of the miners and their wives and families, and the amount which the miner is willing to pay as rent. Further, there are obstacles in the way of improving the house accommodation caused by the frequent changes in the occupation arising from the migratory habits of many of the miners; want of care in using the houses; and it must be added, the imperfect knowledge of domestic economy and the slovenly habits of many of the wives

in connection with Fifeshire collieries.

of the miners. Some excuse is due to the wives, as they must have a great deal to do in securing cleanliness when burdened with the care of a young family and the work arising out of the unclean state in which the husbands return from their work. The condition of matters is frequently aggravated by the badly paved condition of the roads and the surroundings of the houses, particularly in bad weather

4. As regards overcrowding, it does exist but only to a very limited extent. For this the workmen must for the most part be held responsible, as it is caused by taking in lodgers or by the number of children in a family.

5. As regards rents, it cannot be said that they are excessive, if a return is to be obtained on the capital expended and provision made for repairs and for the payment of tenants taxes, which are almost always paid by the owner. The moderation of the rents can be tested by a comparison of the rents paid to owners of houses not connected with the coal-owners. It should be borne in mind in making the comparison that the rents paid to the coal-owners covers the taxes on the houses.⁴¹

This report reflected all of the views expressed by the coal-owners to the LGB; only old houses were in bad condition; these were usually associated with old mine workings and therefore did not warrant attention; rents were reasonable and showed little increase; overcrowding was the fault of the miners themselves; and finally, since improvements were gradually taking place it was unnecessary to introduce any radical changes.

8.4. Conclusion

Both sides in the dispute looked at the situation from completely different standpoints, leading to antithetical interpretations. The coal-owners, and arguably the government viewed housing in terms of building stock and

⁴¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Letter dated 18 February 1911 from John Ross to Lord Pentland.

the housing problem as one of efficient and profitable management of properties. The miners on the other hand saw houses as homes and viewed the situation from the occupiers stand-point. They felt entitled to decent homes and a decent standard of living. This was a classic example of a dilemma of capitalism; between exchange value on the one hand, the value of the building stock to the coal companies and the government as a market commodity and investment, and the use value of the houses to the miners and their families as homes.

Such a dilemma was not confined to the Scottish situation but applied to comparable situations on the continent. Similar developments occurred in the Ruhr from the 1860s onwards. There as in Scotland, private enterprise was reluctant to build houses for miners because of the unprofitability of such construction in relation to costs. As a result it was left to the industry to provide for the workers' housing needs. Although the houses erected were recognised as being of high standard, the coal companies of the Ruhr were subject to the same economic pressures as those of Scotland, and became less inclined to invest in housing as the nineteenth century drew to a close. German local authorities, like their Scottish counterparts, refused to contemplate erecting houses themselves, partly because they did not see it as their function and partly because of the costs involved.⁴²

In Scotland, intervention from the State exacerbated coal company anxiety over expenditure on housing but also provided them with an excuse to withdraw from the housing market. The State effectively forced the hands

⁴² Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany. The Miners of the Ruhr*. Clarendon, Oxford.

of the coal companies while backing themselves into a position of having no choice but to intervene to an ever increasing extent.

From the commissioning of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland, both rural and urban, in 1912 through to the Sankey Commission of 1919 and the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry in 1925, Scottish coal-owners were repeatedly required to justify their position and the standards of accommodation they provided. They did so by arguing as they always had done against the demands of the State and miners.

Their first line of argument was that strictly speaking they were under no obligation to provide workers housing and only did so as a matter of economic necessity when no alternative accommodation was available. They were nonetheless aware of the value of housing as a means of attracting workers to the new pits of the east and west coalfields. Since they were under no obligation to provide housing they believed they ought to have been praised instead of censured for doing so.

Their second line of argument was that housing was a poor investment and did not provide an economic return for investment. They were reluctant to invest in better standards and in improvements, or to erect new houses. They did however recognise the value of good housing in terms of placating the workers and in good public relations. The erection of miners' houses following the war was well advertised by coal-owners and their superior qualities emphasised.

Their third argument was that once the government lay down rules and

regulations for housing construction and the provision of facilities, it was its responsibility to take over the provision of miners' houses. Once government responsibility was acknowledged in the majority report of the Royal Commission of 1917 coal-owners were quick to emphasise the point and did so in repeated investigations. They also regularly emphasised that despite the government's expressed intention to provide housing for the working class, private owners and coal companies continued to erect a greater number of houses than local authorities. However they neglected to elucidate that following the 1919, 1921 and 1923 Housing Acts many of the houses built by coal companies were erected with the aid of government subsidies.

Difficulties peculiar to housing provision within the coal-mining industry were also cited as reasons for not erecting adequate housing. The most important of these were the problems of mineral leases themselves; ownership and responsibility for the housing stock and the expected lifespan of the coal-mining operation. Attention was drawn to these problems in the report of the Royal Commission published in 1917.

Chapter 9

"Treated as miners and not as men"¹

The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban; 1912-17

"Bad housing may fairly be regarded as a legitimate cause of social unrest So far as housing is concerned, we cannot but record our satisfaction that after generations of apathy, the workers all over Scotland give abundant evidence of discontent with conditions that no modern community should be expected to tolerate".²

9.1. Introduction.

Discontent over housing provision was not confined to the mining community. Social unrest among urban workers during the First World War had a profound effect on the confidence and determination of the working class to demand improvements to their standard of living. A potent cause of unrest was the increase in rent levels during the war years. Anger at increases of between 10% and 20% for private accommodation culminated in 1915 rent strikes in Glasgow and Birmingham. The working class viewed rent increases as an attempt by landlords to take full advantage

¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum dated 6 February 1911, by Charles Carlow, Managing Director of The Fife Coal Company Ltd., to the Secretary for Scotland, concerning housing accommodation in Fifeshire collieries. (Hereafter: Charles Carlow Memorandum 1911.) The quotation refers to a statement made by T.F. Dewar MD, DSC, Medical Officer for Health in Fifeshire in the 1909 Annual Report to the Local Government Board for Scotland (para. 10 page 159).

² 1917, Cd. 8731 Vol. XIV, Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban, cited in Smout, T.C., (1986) *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, p.53.

of the war situation.³ The government, fearful of industrial and social unrest and the total disruption of munitions production when shipyard and engineering workers threatened to come out in support of the women of Patrick and Govan, imposed rent control in 1915.⁴ The Rent Restrictions Act prevented increase in rent throughout the war years and remained in force until 1923.

Housing condition and absence of maintenance and upkeep were also causes for concern. Provision of better housing was regarded as one means of solving social discontent and of appeasing a dissatisfied workforce. Although it has been suggested by Melling that the State helped to politicise the housing question and encouraged demand for substantial intervention by government with this end in view,⁵ the evidence presented here suggests that the State was a reluctant participant in change. Industrial unrest and popular demand for better living conditions forced the government to "sit up" and take notice of the standard of living of the industrial population. Once it was clear that intervention was inevitable the State attempted as much as possible to control the situation. All of the participants involved in the housing issue in coal-mining communities - coal-owners, miners and government - each attempted to manipulate the situation to their advantage. Success in this depended on their respective power.

Both local and national government were reluctant to become directly involved in protracted negotiations with private enterprise over

³ Orbach, L.F., *Op. cit.* p. 56.

⁴ Smout, T.C. *Op. cit.* p. 269.

⁵ Melling, J. (ed.) (1980) *Housing Social Policy and the State*, Croom Helm, London, p. 22.

responsibility for the provision of workers' houses. The aim of informal discussions with representatives of the coal-owners was to persuade the coal-mining industry to increase investment in real property by erecting enough houses to accommodate workers. These houses would have been erected under provisions laid down in national legislation and local by-laws. By these means the government aimed to regulate building and guarantee minimum standards without footing the bill. Meanwhile, for Scottish coal-owners, house construction and maintenance, were drains on their capital resources. The fact that Scottish building bye laws were the most stringent in Britain only served to exacerbate the situation by increasing costs. With no guarantee of return for their money coal managers and private building contractors displayed equal reluctance to invest in working class housing. Meanwhile the MFGB steadfastly brought the miners' plight to the attention of the general public as well as to the authorities. By 1912 the Scottish Office's slow accumulation of information through local authority enquiry and interviewing of interested parties were viewed by the Miners' Federation as delaying tactics.

By 1912 dissatisfaction at company housing and conditions in colliery communities was such that the Asquith government was all but compelled to take action. In October 1912 the Scottish Office finally gave in to pressure from the Scottish Miners Federation and Labour M.P.s and initiated an independent enquiry into conditions in Scottish working class housing. The terms of reference of the Royal Commission, described as "one of the most influential and informative in Scottish history"⁶ and as "the most thorough investigation of general housing conditions ever undertaken in any part of

⁶ Smout, T.C., *Op. cit.* p. 53.

the United Kingdom"⁷ were as follows;

" . . . to enquire into the housing of the industrial population of Scotland, rural and urban (with special reference in the rural districts to the housing of miners and agricultural labourers) and to report what legislative or administrative action is in their opinion desirable to remedy existing defects."⁸

The report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland is an extensive and descriptive survey of conditions prevalent at the time. Unfortunately, largely due to the political turbulence of the war years, the report never received the recognition it warranted. Unlike the Royal Commission of 1884 it was not used by reformers as a source document highlighting social evils.⁹ Although the report's details were little heeded, the recommendation of the Royal Commission of 1917 received a great deal of attention. In the Commission's majority report, it was publicly stated for the first time, that the State had an obligation to take full responsibility for the housing needs of the working class. This meant that housing of the working class could no longer be regarded as a local problem. Instead it was a question of national importance and had to be dealt with on a national scale. The report of 1917 recommended that a further 236,000 houses were needed in Scotland. Housing provision on the scale necessary to implement this recommendation demanded government intervention.

⁷ Rodger, R., (ed.) (1989) *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century*, Leicester University Press, p. 25.

⁸ SRO WRH DD6/172. Scottish Office memorandum, dated 22 Oct. 1912, regarding the appointment of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban.

⁹ Orbach, L.F., (1977) *Homes for Heroes. A Study of the Evolution of British Public Housing, 1915-1921*. Seeley Service, London, p. 19.

The Commission's brief was to examine housing of the industrial population of Scotland, both rural and urban. Specific attention was to be given to housing in coal-mining communities. Several aspects of miners' housing received particular attention; building condition, living standards, overcrowding, leases and rent. This chapter concerns the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission pertinent to the situation in Fife coal-mining communities. It is intended as a bridge between the previous chapter which outlined developments leading up to the independent enquiry, and the following chapter which concerns the results of post war housing legislation and their effect on social relations in Fife.

9. 2. The Commission's findings.

The Commission appointed consisted of eleven men and one woman and was chaired by Sir Henry Ballantyne, an active Liberal in Peebles. Three members were landowners, including Baron Lovat, and Wm. Younger, Conservative M.P. There was also one municipal representative, one Labour M.P., one miner, one medical man, Dr. W.L. Mackenzie also a member of the L.G.B., one farmer, one coal company manager, one clergyman, the Rev. James Beer and one woman, Mrs. George Kerr, wife to a moderate Labour Councillor in Glasgow.¹⁰ Fife was represented by W.F. Anderson, M.P. and Mr. Charles Carlow, managing director of the Fife Coal Company.

The Commission collected evidence between March 1912 and October 1915.

¹⁰ SRO WRH DD6/172 and Orbach, L.F., *Op. cit.* p. 56.

On instruction from the Treasury and the Secretary for Scotland its work was suspended because of the war and a report was not published until 1917. The Commission's findings and recommendations together with the social upheaval and industrial unrest during the Great War of 1914-18 had a profound effect on housing provision for the industrial population of Scotland.

The conclusions published in the report of 1917 were based upon evidence collected from representatives of central and local authorities, from coal-owners, from the Miners' Federation, from reports of Medical Officers of 1910-12 commissioned the Local Government Board, and finally on personal observation in the counties of Lanark, Fife, Ayr, Midlothian, West Lothian and Sterling. The factors leading to the problems in coal-mining communities were revealed by the Commission to have been (a) the necessity for a supply of labour close to the mines, (b) the commercial necessity to economise on provision of housing as part of the mining plant, (c) the speculative risk involved in the limited life of the mine.¹¹

Miners' houses were described in the following terms;

"The 'Miners Row' of inferior class is often a dreary and featureless place, with houses dismal in themselves arranged in monotonous lines or in squares. The opened spaces are encumbered with washhouses, privies, etc. . . . and in wet weather get churned up into a morass of semi-liquid mud with little in the way of solidly constructed road or footpath.

The houses vary greatly in construction, but a large number are of two types. The older is either 'a single

¹¹ 1917, Cd. 8731 Vol. XIV, Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban, (subsequently Royal Commission 1917) p. 126, para. 871.

end' or "but-and-ben" (one or two rooms). it has only one door and the solid back wall is pierced only by the smallest of windows, if by any, so that through ventilation does not exist."¹²

Faults identified included leaky roofs, damp walls, the absence of damp proof courses, no proper rhones or down pipes, poor ventilation, floors of uneven and broken bricks, broken plaster and fissures caused by subsidence.¹³ The kitchen was generally also a sleeping room and in some of the worst houses the only place for coal storage was under the bed. In numerous cases water had not been introduced into the houses but was fetched from a standpipe at the end of the row. Occasionally there were properly constructed common washhouses but in old villages only makeshift washhouses and coalhouses erected by the miners themselves were in use. The sanitary conditions in coal-mining villages were described as an "abomination". "Privy middens" were the normal sanitary facility provided. These had been banned in urban areas but continued in use in mining villages.

"A large erection open on one side, where ashes and all other household refuse are thrown in and closed on the side which serves as latrine. It is the only sanitary convenience in many rows impossible to keep clean foul smelling and so littered with filth of all sorts that no decent woman can use it."¹⁴

In old villages the sites were often ill-chosen, with no consideration for the nature of the soil, subsoil or drainage. The path of least resistance was always adopted. The houses were built of the cheapest available material and arranged in the cheapest possible forms, either straight parallel rows or

¹² Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 872.

¹³ Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 873.

¹⁴ Royal Commission 1917, p. 369, para. 2.

squares. Primitive privies, ashpits, washhouses and other outhouses were erected in the most conspicuous places.¹⁵

The proportion of miners houses owned by coal companies in Lanarkshire was 38.7% over the landward area. In Stirlingshire and Dumbartonshire 37% of miners employed in 1908 were housed in company property. In Mid and West Lothian the proportion was much higher; there 75.3% of colliers were living in company housing. In Ayrshire it was estimated that 75% of the 4,000 miners lived in "tied" housing.¹⁶

Conflicting evidence was presented for Fife. Dr. Dewar of the Local Government Board estimated that at least 90% of the county's miners were housed by the coal companies. This conflicted with figures presented by the Fife Coal Company which before the outbreak of war employed 12,700 men but only owned 2952 houses, and the Wemyss Coal Company which houses 34.75% of it's workforce. However, these were the official figures and did not take account of the number of employees living "unofficially" as lodgers or in sublet accommodation.

Fife coal-mining villages; Coaltown of Wemyss, Methilhill, Kelty and Townhill Dunfermline, were visited on 24 April 1913. The Commission found the Coaltown of Wemyss interesting as it had examples of old miners' houses as well as dwellings showing "progressive improvement" in standard of accommodation. The improvement was a result partly of reconstruction and partly of the erection of entirely new houses. The area was described as being "well crowded" with buildings and the typical house

¹⁵ Royal Commission 1917, p. 369, para. 2

¹⁶ Royal Commission 1917, p. 148, para. 985.

consisted of three rooms (with two beds in the main room) and water closet and coal storage in the house. Several had been erected on old foundations which reduced the price of their construction. They had been built at a cost of £160 a piece and were rented for 9s. 6d. a week or £13 per annum. Older houses, those built 25 years earlier, with a water closet and scullery in the house, were rented for 2s. 6d. per week.¹⁷ It was noted by the Commission that there was a tendency to subdivide the houses. Instances of a room in a two roomed dwelling being sublet for 2 shillings a week were recorded. The usual rent for these houses was 4s. 3d. a week. It was also noted that the houses formerly had gardens but that the provision of garden space had been discontinued.

Methilhill had older houses. In a row of "very poor" one roomed cottages rented for 1s. 4d. a week, some were damp and there was no wash house provided, no water closet for women and a filthy common trough closet was provided for the men. The sanitary conditions in the village were said to be "very defective" and the ashpits were cleaned out only once a week.¹⁸ The Commission felt that these houses were unfit for rebuilding or repair.

At Adams Terrace, Kelty, the whole street of recently erected houses was destroyed by subsidence which had occurred over a three month period and said to have been the result of "unknown ancient workings". The houses were to be repaired once subsidence ceased. Meanwhile though, some had been closed while others were still occupied, even though "daylight was visible through the cracks and the structure had to be shored up with stout

¹⁷ Royal Commission 1917, p. 158, notes on visit to Coaltown of Wemyss, Fife, 24 April 1913.

¹⁸ Royal Commission 1917, p. 159, notes on visit to Methilhill, Fife, 24 April 1913.

timber posts".¹⁹ Subsidence was a particular problem in Fifeshire and Lanarkshire where charters for building under some mineral leases excluded the right to claim for compensation for damage due to subsidence (see Chapter 4).

Townhill, Dunfermline had a "large number of defective houses and a large amount of repairs". Many of the old houses in this village had long been regarded as unfit to live in and not worth repairing. Many others were already closed and derelict. The problem here lay with the lease and the fact that the Corporation of Dunfermline was the proprietor of the land. The town council let the colliery together with ninety-seven houses on a nineteen year lease. The Local Government Board had for many years "the greatest difficulty" in securing the repair or closure of the houses, largely because of divided responsibility for the houses between the Council and the coal company.²⁰

Despite all of these problems coal company houses in Fife were described as some of the best in the country. The Coaltown of Wemyss in particular was singled out for special praise.

"At Coaltown of Wemyss, Fife and Newbattle, Midlothian, improved houses are being erected; and it is interesting to note that these two districts today possess some of the best miners houses in the east of Scotland."²¹

¹⁹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 159, notes on visit to Adams Terrace, Kelty, Fife, 24 April 1913.

²⁰ Royal Commission 1917, p. 159, notes on visit to Townhill, Fife, 24 April 1913 and p. 150, para. 995.

²¹ Royal Commission 1917 p. 127, para. 867.

It is not surprising that these were of high quality as they were the property of the Wemyss Coal Company headed by Randolph Wemyss who was keenly interested in architecture. The houses were designed and executed to a very high standard by the company architect, Alex Todd, and were exceptions to the rule [see Plates 1,2 & 3].

Dr. Dewar of the Local Government Board did however remark that the general improvement in miners' houses in Fife did not extend to their setting. Planning and arrangement he regarded as by no means unimportant, but it was the aspect in which recently extended mining centres of Fifeshire showed less favourably.²² According to D.W. Robertson, architect to the Fife Coal Company, both employers and miners were reacting against the careless and monotonous arrangement of the rows.²³ Praise was given to houses at Valleyfield in Fife and at Kirkconnell in Dumfries for their "pleasing layout".²⁴ High Valleyfield was the property of the Fife Coal Company. The houses were arranged in crescents of two and three roomed dwellings, each with a scullery, w.c. and a kitchen range for hot water. Some houses had baths while each had a back door opening onto a garden. The scheme was described as carefully designed with an admirable site and generous open space.²⁵ Although the ideals of the garden city movement influenced the design and layout of this village, it failed to take

²² Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 875 ; re. statement of evidence 764 and Report on the Housing of Miners in Fifeshire 1909, par. 33.

²³ Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 875, evidence of D.W. Robertson, architect, Fife Coal Company Ltd.

²⁴ Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, par. 876.

²⁵ Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 876.

local custom into account. A major drawback to the scheme was the presence of the back door as it allowed the tenants to sublet one room with its own entrance and garden. At the time of the Royal Commission's visit in 1913 there were houses sublet while others remained empty.²⁶

While acknowledging the undoubted praise-worthy features of this scheme it must be remembered that the managing director of the Fife Coal Company was a member of the commission. The only houses belonging to this company criticised by the commission were those at Kelty, and their poor condition was attributed to subsidence and not to neglect by the company. At High Valleyfield the problem of overcrowding was allegedly caused by the "type" of tenants taken. It was said that new collieries tended to attract "a shifty and unsatisfactory workman". In such circumstances the company claimed that any efforts they made "met with less response and greater difficulties than would be the case in a more settled area with a steady type of miner".²⁷ In all instances of criticism the company refused to take responsibility, blaming instead natural causes and the character of the tenants.

However, not all of the houses in the Fife, or indeed in the Parish of Wemyss were as good quality as those described above. In December 1913 a closing order was pronounced by Kirkcaldy District Committee on houses in Kirkland near Methil, the property of the Wemyss Trustees. In June of 1914 the houses were condemned as "unfit for human habitation" and a warrant for the ejection of the tenants was granted by the Sheriff Interlocator in July,

²⁶ Royal Commission 1917, p. 127, para. 876.

²⁷ Royal Commission 1917, p. 142, para. 960.

under section 17(4) of the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act.²⁸ The dwellings were described by Dr. Yule, the Fife Medical Officer for Health, as in a deplorable condition and unfit for human habitation, leaving the local authority with little option but to close them. The proprietors were reported to be "quite willing that the great majority of the houses should be closed as unfit for human habitation". The tenants, however, were reluctant to move until they had other houses to go to.

The case was reported widely across Scotland in both *The Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* in such terms as "House Famine in Fifeshire" and "The Scarcity of Houses near Leven: Tenants Refuse to Quit".²⁹ The matter was referred to the Local Government Board which sent its medical inspector, Dr. Dittmar to view the houses. The visit took place on 8 July 1914, in the company of Dr. Yule, the County Medical Officer.³⁰ Dr. Dittmar's report is valuable as it clearly details living conditions in the average Fife community in 1914.

The houses at Kirkland were old, built about one hundred years previously. They had red tile roofs and looked their best at the time of Dr. Dittmar's visit as it was the height of the summer and all the doors and windows were open and the pavements dry and clean. The rooms were small however, with low ceilings of about six feet six inches and the bedrooms were

²⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by the Medical Inspector, F. Dittmar, MA, MD., on Housing Conditions in Kirkland Rows in the Kirkcaldy District of Fife presented to the Local Government Board for Scotland, 9 July 1914 (subsequently Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914).

²⁹ *The Scotsman*, 1 June 1914 and *The Glasgow Herald*, 23 July 1914.

³⁰ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

described as mere closets at the back of a small kitchen or living room. Windows had to be removed completely from their frames in order to let in air and light. The woodwork and floors were in a general state of disrepair. There were no damp courses and no under floor ventilation, no rhones or downpipes. Water soaked into the foundations. The water supply came from two stand wells in the street outside. There were no sinks in any of the houses. Sanitation consisted of an iron sanitary convenience with a trough closet and one urinal, described as similar to the old kind of iron urinal found in towns. These were not in a clean state at the time of the inspection and never used by women. There were two open brick built ashpits which contained domestic refuse and faeces as well as ashes. Some wooden shelters served as wash houses but these were falling down and the wood was used to fuel the washing coppers. Coal was stored in a recess inside the houses.³¹

The houses at Kirkland Newtown consisted of eight two storey tenements containing thirty two separate dwellings, four single storey cottages, three two storey tenements of six houses and a tenement of two storeys with four houses. The two storey tenements consisted of a room to the front with one or two small closets at the back just large enough to contain a bed and a chest of drawers. The windows were not hung from window frames but had to be bodily removed for ventilation. Although the walls were not damp on 8 July 1914 they showed signs of damp in peeling wall paper and staining. Floors and woodwork were generally in need of repair.³²

The six dwellings in the three two storey tenements were all empty. Two of

³¹ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

³² SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

the four single storey cottages were also derelict. Of the remaining two, one was to be vacated in favour of a new house at Methilhill while the other had sagging ceilings in danger of falling down. The last tenement was the only one described as being in "a fairly satisfactory state of repair".³³ Ceilings were high and floors were in good condition. There were no sinks in the houses and the rhones and down pipes were in need of attention. Despite these defects the tenants of these houses did not receive notice to quit.

The houses at Kirklandhall were in two groups; four single storey cottages and a three storey tenement standing in an open space containing fifteen separate houses. All of these dwellings were old and in a state of disrepair. There were no damp proof courses and no under floor ventilation, no rhones or down pipes and no paving. The only water supply came from a stand well in the street and sanitation consisted of four trough closets used by the men and iron "conveniences". The open ashpits were used for domestic refuse, wet refuse, faeces and ashes.³⁴

Each of the four cottages had a room in front with two small closets behind used as bedrooms. The front rooms had a large window which had to be lifted out for ventilation. The sleeping "closets" were lit by one small glass tile, which also had to be removed to let in air. This was not regarded as sufficient to give good light or ventilation. It was concluded that these cottages were unfit for habitation due to general disrepair, dampness and inadequate light and ventilation.³⁵

³³ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

³⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

³⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum from F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

In the three storey tenement only four of the fifteen dwellings were in a satisfactory condition. Eleven houses were under notice of closure. These all suffered from the problems described above; dampness, general disrepair, poor ventilation etc. It was the tenants of these houses that complained of not being able to find new homes.

In all there were 45 houses condemned of which nineteen were already empty and one was due to be vacated. Twenty four were still occupied but no rent was charged since the dwellings were condemned. The houses had served their day and were described as "worn out and done".³⁶ They could have been put to right if a considerable amount of money was spent on their repair. Dr. Dittmar however felt this would be a waste of money since the proprietors were in favour of their closure.

In relation to alternative accommodation for the tenants, Dr. Dittmar highlighted the proximity to Kirkland of the Burghs of Buckhaven, Methil, Innerleven and Leven, and of the houses then being erected at Methilhill at the time by the Wemyss Coal Company. Other centres of population with accommodation could easily be reached by electric tramway. He therefore felt that it was more than likely that houses could be found for all of the tenants forced to move. Although Dittmar concluded that no great hardship would result from the closure of the houses he did however note that proprietors tended to choose their tenants carefully to an ever greater extent and that this factor might exclude some people.³⁷ In the meantime the

³⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170: memorandum from F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

³⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170/6: Memorandum by F. Dittmar, 9 July 1914.

proprietors were charging no rent for the condemned properties and the occupants were being allowed time to look for new homes.

In evidence to the Royal Commission concerning average housing standards in coal-mining communities the architectural inspector to the Local Government Board for Scotland stated that

"In many parts of Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and Fifeshire the old houses occupied by miners and other workers are barely above the habitable standard, this being due to these houses being from sixty to a hundred years old; and they have as a rule, the plaster placed hard on the outside walls; there are no rhones or down pipes to carry off roof water, no damp proof courses at the ground level of the outside walls; they have tile or brick floors with the bare earth exposed under the beds, and where wood floors have been laid there is no ventilation underneath them; in many cases the roof timbers have sagged and the tile or slate roof covering has been left unrepaired. All of these defects tend to bring a dwelling house into such a state of structural disrepair that the house sooner or later falls below the habitable standard."³⁸

The concept of "unfit for human habitation" was fraught with difficulties. The exact meaning of the terms was never precisely explained in legislation and it was generally left to the discretion of the individual health inspectors and medical officers to decide for themselves. Some guide-lines rather than precise interpretations were given in health and housing legislation. Terms such as "nuisance", "dangerous and injurious to health" and "unfit for human habitation" were presented as given and understood concepts and often used interchangeably. In part II of the Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1867 concerning the removal of "nuisance" a nuisance was defined as

³⁸ 1908 Cd. 4016 Vol XCIII 445 and SRO WRH DD6/265/1 no. 19726/4.

"any insufficiency of size, defect of structure, defect of ventilation, want of repair or proper drainage or suitable water closet, or privy accommodation or cesspool or any other matter or circumstance rendering any inhabited house, building, premises, or part thereof, injurious to the health of the inmates or unfit for human habitation".³⁹

Any pool watercourse, ditch, gutter, drain, sewer, privy, urinal, cesspool, ashpit, farm building, accumulation or deposit of manure or other offensive matter, and any house or part of a house so overcrowded as to be dangerous or injurious to the health of the inmates, were all also designated nuisances. According to the Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement (Scotland) Act of 1875 a house was unfit for human habitation if deficient in light, air, ventilation, or proper convenience.⁴⁰ By 1890 and the passage of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of that year, it had become the duty of the local authority to inspect districts for unfit houses.⁴¹ However the onus was placed upon the Medical Officer for Health in each district to "represent to the local authority of that district any dwelling house which appears to him to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation". The Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1897 repeated the designation of the 1867 act and defined any premises or part thereof of such a condition or in such a state as to be a nuisance or injurious or dangerous to health and any house so overcrowded as to be injurious or dangerous to the health of the inmates, as "unfit" for habitation.⁴²

³⁹ 1867 Public Health (Scotland) Act, 30 and 31 Vict. c. 101.

⁴⁰ 1875 Artisans and Labourers Dwelling (Improvement) Act, 38 and 39 Vict. c. 49.

⁴¹ 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act, 53 and 54 Vict. c. 70.

⁴² 1897 Public Health (Scotland) Act, 60 and 61 Vict. c. 38.

The Majority Report of the Royal Commission of 1917 stated that Public Authorities should be enabled to deal with a house without having to prove that it was either dangerous or injurious to health or unfit for habitation. The report suggested that local authorities should be given power to frame bye-laws to deal with the maintenance of housing and minor defects and not just with their construction. In 1919 in a report on the housing of miners in Lanarkshire, the Clerk of the District Committee of the Middle Ward suggested that the following criteria be used as standards of uninhabitability; damp walls, dilapidated wall surfaces, broken plaster or fittings, broken windows or woodwork, floors holed or so decayed as to give way with pressure; roofs badly in need or repair; defective lighting; ashpits or middens too close to windows; absence of earth closet or water closet facilities, either private or shared; no sink or water supply; insufficient height of ceilings and defective drainage.⁴³ These were the standards in use in Lanarkshire and arrived at largely through trial and error and the experiences of the inspectors concerned.

Thus, despite government intervention in housing and health since the 1860s and post the Royal Commission of 1885 in particular, in 1919 it was at the discretion of the local medical and health inspectors to designate housing as fit or unfit for human occupation. Standards could be applied haphazardly and at random and even if rigorous standards of health and hygiene were applied, local authorities were under no obligation to accept the recommendations of the medical inspectors. With standards open to interpretation they were also wide open to abuse.

⁴³ SRO WRH DD6/1171, 7255/30.

9. 3. Overcrowding in Fife coal-mining communities.

In the majority report of the Royal Commission on Working Class Housing in Scotland it was categorically stated that overcrowding was particularly prevalent in the mining areas of Scotland. With increases in the mining population the existing housing stock was full to capacity. The number of people sharing accommodation and in particular sanitary facilities, (outside ash pits or midden privies), resulted in an overall decline in living standards as well as constituting a serious health risk. Living conditions in overcrowded accommodation and the prevalence of one and two roomed dwellings in Scottish coal-mining villages were sources of unrest in coal-mining communities and one of the reasons the miners insisted upon an independent enquiry.

At the time statistical information on the level of overcrowding was only available from census data. There were however grave problems of definition associated with these. One of the problems of ascertaining the level of overcrowding and of housing conditions was that, as with the concepts of "unfit for habitation" and "dangerous to health", there were no fixed standards of "overcrowding" in either Scottish census reports or in housing and health legislation. It was nonetheless repeatedly asserted that overcrowded accommodation was dangerous and injurious to health. There were also differences of definition between census data collected in England and Wales and those of Scotland.

In Scotland a "house" meant a dwelling with a distinct entrance from a street, court, lane or road, while a "dwelling" had a door opening directly into a common stair or passage. A "room" referred to an apartment with

one or more windows as distinct from compartments with borrowed light such as lobbies, closets or sculleries. The "family" described the occupiers of a house and included a man with his wife and children and any relatives, visitors, servants and people boarding with the family. Lodgers occupying separate rooms were however enumerated separately.⁴⁴ In contrast to this, in English and Welsh census reports a "house" was all the area within party walls; a "tenement" indicated the holding of a family and a "room" was an "elastic and undefined quantity" variously including landing, a closet or any other distinct space within a dwelling.⁴⁵

Another important difference between census information collected in Scotland and that of England and Wales was that in Scotland the enumerator entered the number of rooms while in England and Wales the occupier of a dwelling did so. There were also striking differences between the houses occupied by the working class in Scotland and those of England and Wales.

"The typical residence of the working man whether labourer or skilled mechanic, is in England a cottage of three, four or five rooms; in Scotland it is a flat of one, two or three rooms As regards the flats themselves the rooms are generally much larger than most in an English cottage, and moreover in nearly all of the tenements additional accommodation is afforded in one or two of the rooms by a 'bed recess' or space sufficient to contain a large bedstead."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ SRO WRH DD6/265/1.

⁴⁵ English Census Report 1891 Vol. IV p. 20. and SRO WRH DD6/265/1.

⁴⁶ 1908 Cd. 3864 CVII 319 Report of an Inquiry by the Board of Trade into working class rents, housing and retail prices, together with the standard rates of wages prevailing in certain occupations in the principle industrial towns of the U.K. and SRO WRH DD6/265/1.

Since comparable information was not available it was difficult to ascertain the extent of the problem of overcrowding. There was no fixed standard on the number of occupants to a room that constituted "overcrowding". Nonetheless details of the number of occupants per room were recorded. In censuses three tests were taken; the number of people living more than two to a room, more than three to a room and more than four to a room.⁴⁷ One problem associated with these tests on overcrowding was raised in parliament in April 1913.

"In censuses previous to 1911 a lodger was treated as constituting a separate 'family', while from 1911 onwards he was treated as a member of a household; so while the figures of the census strictly show the amount of population living in houses of standard size those of the previous censuses did not do so, but show the amount of population living in 'families' occupying one, two or more rooms."⁴⁸

In other words before 1911 the census recorded the number of families occupying furnished accommodation and thus the "occupier" included a tenant and his family, but not lodgers, who were enumerated as separate "families". After 1911 the number of households were recorded and a household included the tenant, family, relatives, lodgers and anyone who happened to be present at the time. The change in enumeration method had two effects; it reduced the apparent (rather than the actual) number of persons living in one roomed houses because there were fewer "households" according to the new definition than "families" of the old definition, while increasing the number living in two, three or four roomed

⁴⁷ SRO WRH DD6/265/1 No. 19726/4 Housing Conditions in Scotland, Returns 2 April 1908.

⁴⁸ SRO WRH DD6/265/2 No. 19726/7: Notice of Question in Parliament April 22 1913 re. Housing Conditions in Scotland.

houses. It thus gave a false impression of the situation. The apparent decrease in the number occupying one roomed houses was a result of a change of method rather than an actual decline in the provision of one roomed houses.

Little progress was made in the standard of Scottish housing accommodation between 1861 and 1914. According to the census of 1861 72% of all Scottish families lived in houses of not more than two rooms while family size led to a high level of overcrowding "with all its attendant evils" in such houses.⁴⁹ Throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century epidemic diseases such as dysentery, typhus and tuberculosis were rampant in overcrowded slum dwellings. In 1911 between 47% and 49% of the Scottish population lived in either one or two apartment houses, while the contemporary figure for the English population was 7.5%.⁵⁰ The actual figure of 2.3 million was the result of a steady increase since 1861. According to the same census data 56% of one room houses and 47% of rooms in two room dwellings were each occupied by more than two people.⁵¹ The overall figure for the proportion of Scots living at a density of more than two per room was 45.1%; a figure which was in stark contrast with the proportion of 9.1% for England.⁵²

The standard of more than two persons per room was generally used as a

⁴⁹ Lenman, B., (1977) *An Economic History of Modern Scotland* Batsford, London, p. 202.

⁵⁰ Lenman, B., *Op. cit.* p. 202.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Rodger, R. (ed.) (1989) *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century*. Leicester University Press, p. 29 .

statistical indicator of overcrowding. This was also the usual standard outside of the United Kingdom; in 1905 the German Verein took as their measure of overcrowding a density of more than two people per room.⁵³ However no standard of overcrowding was applied to the vast majority of Scottish homes other than houses in urban centres until the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act of 1903 recommended cubic capacities for houses of up to three rooms.⁵⁴

As a statistical test of overcrowding the Royal Commission took the proportion of the population living three and more to a room according to the census of 1911. This test corresponded with the census categories of "more than two to a room", "more than three. . ." , etc. The results showed that the seven burghs and eight counties showing the highest levels of overcrowding were also those with a large mining population. Bearing in mind that the census of 1911 officially showed a decline in the number occupying one room dwellings and that this has been showed to be a result of changes in statistical method rather than in actual numbers, the tables produced by the Royal Commission must have underestimated the situation. Indeed the Commission added 8,000 houses to the census figure of 113,430 overcrowded dwellings because it regarded the census estimate for rural areas as far too low.⁵⁵

The worst conditions of overcrowding existed in mining areas and crofting

⁵³ Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany, The Miners of the Ruhr*, p. 40.

⁵⁴ 3 Edw. 7. c. 33.

⁵⁵ Royal Commission, 1917, p. 146, para. 978.

communities in the Outer Hebrides. The Commission was however at pains not to imply that a low standard of housing accommodation was the sole cause of this correlation between overcrowding and coal-mining.

"But, there is no doubt that in mining districts, especially in the West of Scotland, the movement from one and two rooms to three rooms as the standard family house has been slower than among other sections of the population. but in this connection it must be kept in view that until recently, few, practically no three room houses have been built in mining villages."⁵⁶

Mr. Walker Smith's submission to the Commission on an estimate of "new houses required" based on a double test of overcrowding and uninhabitability resulted in an average of 11.6% across Scotland: 18.59% for mining districts as opposed to 9.27% in the large burghs and 12.11% in the small burghs.

Disquiet over overcrowding did not initially arise in the twentieth century. As early as 1843 in a report commissioned by the government housing accommodation in Fife was described as "meagre in the extreme".

"At many collieries the custom was to let houses of one room to newly married people and two rooms to men with families. The ceilings were low and the windows small and earth floors were the order of the day. Little attention was paid to drainage."⁵⁷

Evidence was presented to the Royal Commission on Labour in 1892 on inadequate housing provision in coal-mining districts. At William Dixon and Company colliery village in Auchenraith forty-two single room houses

⁵⁶ Royal Commission, 1917, p. 126, para. 870.

⁵⁷ Royal Commission 1917, p. 125, para. 866.

and forty-one two room houses accommodated four hundred and ninety two people, with no wash houses, running water and dreadful sanitary provision.⁵⁸

It was noted in the report of the Royal Commission that the situation had changed little by 1917. Indeed the Commission found conditions in overcrowded houses so bad that they referred to inhabitants as "inmates".⁵⁹ Two causes of the problem were recognised; the insufficient number of houses in Scottish coal-mining communities and the instance of one and two roomed dwellings. The lack of suitable accommodation encouraged tenants to take in lodgers and to sublet any spare room. Both practices raised the level of overcrowding.

If a house had two or three rooms and particularly if there was a back door, the back room was often sublet to another family. This practice gave rise inadvertently to "back to back" housing the construction of which was banned in the 1909 Housing Act.⁶⁰ The families residing in sublet accommodation often had no access to sanitary facilities. Where shared facilities were provided they were used by far more than originally intended. The resulting overcrowding was a strain on living resources and added to health problems and general discomfort.

It was also customary in coal-mining districts to take in lodgers. Unmarried miners who migrated to an area where they had no local contacts or ties

⁵⁸ Smout, T.C., *op. cit.* p. 103.

⁵⁹ Orbach, L.F., *op. cit.* p. 58.

⁶⁰ 1909 Housing Town Planning Etc. Act 9 Edw. 7 c. 44.

took up "digs" with local families. Kellogg Durland describes conditions in the house in Kelty, Fife where he lodged in 1901;

"It was a typical miner's house, one of a brick row with a triangular roof. There was a parlour and kitchen on the ground floor and an attic above. When we were all at home there was little spare room, as together, family and boarders, we made up a company of fourteen . ."61

Four people shared the parlour, another four shared the kitchen and five lodgers occupied the attic on a rota system; the night shift miners slept during the day while the day shift workers slept in the same beds when they were vacated. (The fourteenth family member was the pet dog.) Each tenant paid twelve shillings a week board and lodging, with washing and mending. The price remained constant no matter how many or few shared the accommodation. Indeed Durland was lucky to have any accommodation at all. On arrival in Edinburgh he was told he might have difficulty in finding a place to stay in Kelty since the village was known to be so overcrowded.⁶² The sanitary inspector in Fife reported to the Royal Commission that in a two roomed house in Dunfermline the kitchen was occupied by a husband and wife with three children and two lodgers while the bedroom was sublet to another husband and wife with one child. In another instance the kitchen was occupied by the official tenant, his mother and two adult brothers and the other room by a man with his wife and four children. In yet another case two families consisting of five adults and eight children occupied a two room dwelling while yet again in another house a family of six adults and six children shared two rooms.⁶³

⁶¹ Durland, K., (1904) *Among the Fife Miners* Swan, Sonnenschein and Co. London, p. 105.

⁶² Durland, K., *Op. cit.* p. 10.

⁶³ Royal Commission 1917, p. 146, para. 978.

Overcrowding and subletting was not a feature of old houses alone. It was also noted in the new village of High Valleyfield built by the Fife Coal Company in 1910-11. Some houses were overcrowded while others in the scheme were left empty, indicating that rent was a problem for the tenants. The particular problem here was that the houses had back, as well as front doors. This feature was praised in both the Royal Commission report and in contemporary newspaper articles.⁶⁴ However, the presence of back door made it easy for the tenant to sublet the rear room as a separate house with its own entrance.

The provision of beds in the kitchen of miners' houses, a practice common throughout Scottish working class houses of the period, was thought to encourage subletting by allowing miners to conduct their full family life in one room, and thus leaving the other largely unused and free to sublet. A more plausible cause of subletting and taking in lodgers was that the tenants considered the rent too high and let out space as a means of making ends meet.

Overcrowding was not a feature of Scottish or indeed British mining villages alone. There was a housing shortage in the German Ruhr during the 1860s and 1870s. There too the response was to take in lodgers and to sublet accommodation. Taking in lodgers was one of the few ways open to tenants to earn extra cash. The advantage for the lodger was that he gained ready access to a family and the social life of the community. In Germany

⁶⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1170 No. 7255/11, *The Scotsman* 8 Aug. 1910 and Royal Commission 1917 p. 127, para. 876, p. 141, para. 958.

the practice was criticised because it not only led to overcrowding but also allegedly to moral decay since it freed young people from parental control.⁶⁵ The practice was also seen as a threat to family life in that it had a detrimental effect on the host family.⁶⁶ This may indeed have been the case as living in overcrowded conditions was hardly beneficial to any of the occupants. Women in particular bore the burden of catering for family and lodgers. Durland describes the lives of the wives and daughters of miners in Fife as near servile. They worked all day washing clothes, cooking and cleaning and often had to rise several times in the night to dry clothes and prepare food for shift workers. On top of all this they were expected to wait upon their men folk when they returned from the pits.

Nevertheless the practice of subletting and taking in lodgers must be seen as the tenants saw it; as a matter of economic expediency and necessity. Incoming miners needed accommodation and the resident population took advantage of the extra income by merely filling a gap in the local economy. Subletting and lodging in the local community also provided coal companies with workers without the obligation to house them.

It was suggested in 1911 that one roomed houses ought to be prohibited. This was pressed for by the miners' union in meetings with the secretary for Scotland.⁶⁷ The government's position was however that no serious

⁶⁵ Hickey, S.H.F., (1985) *Workers in Imperial Germany, The Miners of the Ruhr*, p. 49.

⁶⁶ Hickey, S.H.F., *Op. cit.* p. 50.

⁶⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170 Deputations from the Scottish Miners Federation to the Scottish Office, Edinburgh and London, 1 Jan. 1909, 26 Apr. 1911 and 20 Nov. 1911.

objection could be raised to the erection of one roomed houses if they were to be occupied by a young married couple, a childless couple or a couple with one or two small children. In any event the 1911 census gave the impression that one room houses were in decline.

Between the late 1890s and the Royal Commission the Wemyss Coal Company erected 715 houses. Of these 300 had a room and kitchen and 415 had two rooms and a kitchen.⁶⁸ The manager of the Wemyss Coal Company stated that after erecting a large number of three room houses, they had to resume construction of two room dwellings as young married miners were either reluctant or unwilling to rent and furnish a three roomed house.⁶⁹ Nevertheless the latter were just as likely to be sublet as two room dwellings.⁷⁰ In Fife Coal Company properties, less than 2% were one room dwellings, over 80% were two roomed and the remainder three apartment houses. The Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company owned 1024 houses in West Fife; 106 had one room, 797 had two rooms and only 121 three rooms. According to the census of 1911 the west Fife burghs of Lochgelly and Cowdenbeath, chiefly occupied by miners, 11.5% and 16.6% of the houses were one roomed, 65.2% and 58% were two roomed and 16.2.% and 18.4% respectively were of three rooms.⁷¹ The coal-owners of both Fife and Lanarkshire claimed that demand was for two apartment homes while

⁶⁸ Royal Commission 1917, p. 137, para. 939.

⁶⁹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 137, para. 939.

⁷⁰ Royal Commission 1917, p.137, para. 943, evidence from Kirkby, manager of the Wemyss Coal Company Ltd.

⁷¹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 137, para. 940, evidence from Robertson, architect, Fife Coal Company Ltd.; Paul, manager, Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company Ltd.; Census report for 1911.

larger dwellings often stood vacant and unlet. In Fife a coal company could let a one room house much quicker than a bigger dwelling.⁷² Two room dwellings were the most popular form of house, while three apartment homes were by and large exceptions to the rule.

As far as the Local Government Board was concerned there was a danger of subletting if more than a family's perceived needs were provided for. Keeping lodgers was prohibited. It was nonetheless impossible to legislate to this effect since subletting would not have occurred if an adequate number of houses were provided. Local Authorities were exhorted to make "vigorous use of their powers" to prevent overcrowding although as explained earlier there were no guide-lines as to what constituted an overcrowded dwelling and little the local authorities could do to prevent subletting and taking in lodgers.

Widely divergent views were expressed to the commission on where responsibility for overcrowding lay. Sanitary inspectors laid the blame with the coal-owners; coal companies did erect houses for workers, but, never enough. One hundred and sixty eight houses were erected in west Fife to accommodate six hundred and twenty employees, while in the case of another mine, nothing had been done to house five hundred new workers. The reason given by the coal company was that the proprietor of the land refused the company a site for houses. The men had to find accommodation in nearby villages which only served to increase overcrowding there.

In 1909 Dr. Dewar, the Medical Officer of Health for Fife, reported to the

⁷² Royal Commission 1917, p. 141, para. 960, evidence from Robertson, architect, Fife Coal Company Ltd.

Local Government Board that local coal company managers did all they could to keep the level of overcrowding down. However he also wrote that except for the village of Bowhill in west Fife that company housing did not keep pace with population increase. At all other collieries he stated, tenants were "treated as miners and not as men".⁷³ Charles Carlow, managing director of the Fife Coal Company, one of the largest mining operations in Scotland at the time, challenged Dr. Dewar's statements in a memorandum to the Local Government Board. Bowhill miners he claimed were treated no better than any others. (it is notable that he did not say that all other miners were treated as well as those at Bowhill!)⁷⁴

Like all other colliery companies in Scotland the Fife Coal Company "built the necessary number of houses to enable them to put out a certain quantity of coals."⁷⁵ Furthermore he asserted that the company did not wish

" to have any larger output and decline to build more houses consequently, still men do take in friends and give them accommodation in the hope that when a house gets empty it may fall to their lot to get it. I cannot see where any complaint attaches to the company on this score . . . "⁷⁶

Carlow regarded overcrowding as a matter for the tenants themselves. He

⁷³ T.F. Dewar; 1909 report to the Local Government Board for Scotland on the housing conditions of miners in Fifeshire, cited in SRO WRH DD6/1170.

⁷⁴SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Mr. Charles Carlow, Managing Director of the Fife Coal Company Ltd., dated February 1911, prepared at the suggestion of John Ross, Esq., LL.D. Dunfermline, on the question of housing accommodation in connection with Fifeshire collieries.

⁷⁵ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Charles Carlow, February 1911.

⁷⁶ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Charles Carlow, February 1911.

believed it a family matter if miners chose to take in lodgers. He was reluctant to take legal action to eject such tenants from company property as this was "always an unpleasant thing to do". He defended the actions of his company officials and protested that where overcrowding existed it was always without their knowledge.⁷⁷ In a report to the Local Government Board in 1911 it was stated regarding overcrowding:

"it does exist but only to a very limited extent. For this the workmen must for the most part be held responsible, as it is caused by taking in lodgers or by the number of children in a family."⁷⁸

The Royal Commission report commented that the Fife coal companies seemed quite content to let things take their course and did not exercise control of subletting and overcrowding in the villages they owned. It was even stated in evidence that lodgers employed by other coal companies were not allowed to be kept. This added weight to the suspicion that the provision of tied housing encouraged coal companies to connive at overcrowding in the case of their own employees.⁷⁹

On the other hand coal managers claimed that considerable efforts were made to control subletting with varying degrees of success. One method used by the Wemyss Coal Company was to intimate that double rent would be charged. The Fife Coal Company architect, D. W. Robertson stated that his company had not found it possible to deal with lodgers but that they

⁷⁷ SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Charles Carlow, February 1911.

⁷⁸ SRO WRH DD6/1170 Letter dated 18 Feb. 1911, from John Ross LLD. Dunfermline to the Secretary for Scotland, Lord Pentland at Whitehall, on the subject of colliers' houses in Fifeshire.

⁷⁹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 149, para. 986.

discouraged subletting to separate families as much as possible. Consequently, according to Robertson, the practice was "very rare" in Fife Coal Company houses. The ultimate remedy was ejection, but the representatives of both the Fife Coal Company and the Wemyss Coal Company were reluctant to resort to such drastic action.

There is little doubt that coal managers and their company officials turned a blind eye to overcrowding. It did after all provide the company with the workers it needed without the obligation to provide them with homes. The Commission concluded that the only way to reduce overcrowding was to provide new houses.

"On the whole the weight of evidence was in favour of placing on the Local Authority the duty of checking subletting; but it is clear that if this is to be done effectively the co-operation of the colliery company or other house owners is essential, in addition to the provision of new and larger houses."⁸⁰

Even without such co-operation the Commission believed that local authorities could compel coal-owners to build more houses if they "rigidly enforced" their powers conferred upon them in section 12 of the Public Health Act of 1897.⁸¹

9. 4. Rent

In attempting to ascertain the cause of overcrowding in coal-mining communities the subject of rent received a great deal of attention. The question asked by the Commission was, did tenants of company housing

⁸⁰ Royal Commission 1917, p. 148, par. 984.

⁸¹ 1897 Public Health (Scotland) Act 60 and 61 Vict. c. 38.

take in lodgers or sublet their accommodation because they could not afford to pay the rent? The coal-owners claimed that miners could easily afford to pay existing rents and even to pay more for larger dwellings. A great variety of rents was charged by coal companies for houses of different sizes. There was no fixed standard or rate. Each coal company charged what they thought expedient and what the miners were willing to pay. The variations in charges were due largely to the gradual change-over that had occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century from the provision of free colliers' housing to the charging of rent. When exactly rents were first charged for Fife miners' houses is unclear although there does seem to be a connection between the imposition of rates on real property in the 1850s and the first payment of rent. By the 1880s some form of payment was made for most company property in Fife.

The advantages to the colliers of occupying "tied" housing were that their homes were situated close to work, rent was cheap and paid in fortnightly instalments. Attitudes were gradually changing however. Colliers were said to have a greater sense of independence when they lived in privately rented accommodation. They also developed a preference for living in a central location within easy access of several pits, rather than be tied to one pit by living in a company house. It might seem reasonable that occupancy of a company house would permit a miner to work in any of that company's pits, but this was not the case. Wherever possible a collier was housed in company property close to the mine he worked in. If he moved to another mine, even if owned by the same company, he was expected to vacate the company house. The logic behind such action was, according to Charles Carlow of the Fife Coal Company, that allowing a miner such freedom of

movement would disrupt the efficient running of the mining operation.⁸² Coal-owners claimed that they count count "more steadily" on the work of colliers who dwelt in company property. It is not surprising that coal-owners found tenants of company housing dependable when they could choose tenants carefully and take advantage of their employees' dependence upon the company.

In Scotland rent for company houses was deducted from a miner's fortnightly wage at source and was generally lower than the market value. This practice was similar to, but not quite the same as the practice in the Great Northern coalfield of Durham and Northumberland. There it was customary to house the collier rent free as part of his wage, while any collier living in non-coal company housing was given a rent allowance in lieu of a company home.⁸³ The amount charged for rent was dictated as much by tradition as by economic considerations. Where the "free house" tradition prevailed rents were less than economic levels. The provision of a home was a direct benefit associated with employment in the mines. A company house was regarded as a customary gratuity, and low rent as a perk of the job.

"The miner had grown up in the belief that he had his house at a cheap rent as a perquisite and he naturally resented higher rent."⁸⁴

⁸² SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Charles Carlow, Feb. 1911

⁸³ Daunton, M. J., (1980) *Miners Housing in South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield 1860-1914. International Review of Social History*, 25 pps. 143-175.

⁸⁴ Royal Commission 1917, pps. 142-143, para. 965.

Miners did not recognise that economic rules applied. When rent increased they were reluctant to pay more. They viewed the amount paid for rent as a standard deduction, a nominal price for the home they were entitled to. The less than economic rent paid for company housing and the resulting low return gained by the companies was a reason given by coal-owners for their reluctance to improve properties and to erect new buildings. For coal companies the return received for company housing did not warrant investment.

It was assumed that Fife miners were unwilling to rent three room dwelling because of the higher rent charged for larger houses and that they sublet three and two apartment houses because they regarded rent for these as excessive. However, it was pointed out by the coal-owners that miners paid a very small proportion of their wages in rent.⁸⁵ In 1913 a miner paid between 1/10 and 1/12 of his wages in rent. This proportion was lower than that paid by shop assistants (between 1/6 and 1/8) and skilled workers in the building trade (between 1/8 and 1/9).⁸⁶ Dr. Dewar estimated that the average rent in Fife amounted to about £5.14s. per annum while the family's annual income could be in the region of £100.⁸⁷ Fife miners then allegedly paid less than 6% of their income on rent.⁸⁸

Rent included the tenant's rates. It was also repeatedly pointed out by coal-owners that each household often had more than one member working in

⁸⁵ Royal Commission 1917, p. 143, par. 968.

⁸⁶ Royal Commission 1917, p. 143, par. 968.

⁸⁷ Royal Commission 1917, p. 148, par. 986.

⁸⁸ Royal Commission 1917, p. 145, par. 974.

the mines which substantially increased household income and their ability to pay higher rent.⁸⁹ Miners living in privately rented accommodation in towns paid a higher proportion of wages in rent than those living in company property. The estimates of the average number occupying Wemyss and Fife coal company houses presented to the Royal Commission were 1.06 and 1.75 miners per house respectively.⁹⁰ These figures were not only an indication of ability to pay more rent but also of each company's policy of allocation of housing.

Return from rent for the coal companies was small. Rents charged included rates, taxes maintenance and upkeep. After deductions and depreciation the coal-owners received about 50%-55% of the rent they charged. Returns from three different Fife coal companies were estimated at 1.65%, 1.77% and 2.83%.⁹¹ An economic return at the time would have been in the region of 4% per annum. The Royal Commission deduced that an "economic rent" for a working class family was in the region of £18 per year. On average miners paid about half of this, close to £9 annually.

However, Dr. Dewar had never known a case of complaint against rent in Fife, except in instances of very poor condition. Coal-miners were often reluctant to demand improvements to their homes. Indeed the majority of witnesses representing colliers stated in evidence to the commission that miners would be willing to pay higher rent for improved housing.⁹² They

⁸⁹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 144, par. 972.

⁹⁰ Royal Commission 1917, p. 144, par. 972.

⁹¹ Royal Commission 1917, p. 145, par. 974.

⁹² Royal Commission 1917, p. 144, para. 973.

accepted the general principal that improved housing meant higher rent. Although willing to pay more for new houses, they were reluctant to pay for improvements to existing houses as they felt that these were generally excessive increases.

If this was the case and if they were generally able to afford to pay more, despite short time, why were they apparently so reluctant to pay higher rents? The answer lies in a short but significant statement given to the Commission in which it was said that workers were not averse to paying fair and reasonable rent for better living conditions but were adamant that they would not pay increased rent that would enable employers to "reap" a higher return for their houses.⁹³ In other words they would pay enough to cover the cost of improvements but not enough to allow the coal-owners to view improvements as a financial investment and thereby make a profit. This was a clash of ideologies; colliers and coal-owners viewed company housing from completely opposing points of view. To the coal-owner housing was an investment of company capital. It was a waste of company resources if no return was gained from capital expenditure. For the miners on the other hand company housing was a provision towards their welfare and were not erected for the benefit of the coal-owners. They viewed housing as a donation from the employers to the workers. Low rent was the return donation from the miners to their employers. Cheap housing was their traditional and natural right. The issues of economic rent, low return and the colliers' ability to pay more were therefore irrelevant. There was no necessity to pay more when housing was provided as part of the job. Such attitudes towards housing, no matter how residual or subconscious they were, acted as much against the miners' union in its efforts to gain

⁹³ Royal Commission 1917, p. 124, para. 861.

independence as against coal companies in their attempts to freely invest company capital.

As a corollary, sub-letting and keeping lodgers although leading to appalling living conditions, had nothing to do with low income or rent. Houses were provided by the companies and it was up to the tenants to do with them as they wished. They sub-let and kept lodgers as a response to the prevailing economic climate; incoming colliers needed accommodation and the resident tenants were glad of the opportunity to make more money. Overcrowding was a result of a local response to the housing shortage. Coal-owners turned a blind eye as it removed from them the responsibility for housing and the obligation to provide accommodation for their workers. The system was therefore of benefit to both sides. Indeed the irony is that although the miners were resisting the influence of capitalism by clinging to pre-industrial practices of housing provision, they were also availing themselves of an economic opportunity provided by the free capitalist economy.

The Commission ultimately concluded that the issue was not whether company housing was giving an adequate return on investment but whether they were fit to be let as dwelling houses. Many were originally erected with a short life expectancy in view but were still in use several generations after construction.

9. 5. Royal Commission; summary and recommendations.

The Royal Commission on the housing of the Scottish working class dealt extensively with several issues directly relevant to social relations within

coal companies and their employees. The issues concerned included conditions in mining villages, overcrowding, wages and rent, and finally the difficulties associated with housing and the industry. That improvements were needed was obvious, particularly in the areas of water supply, sewage and drainage. Reasons why necessary improvements had not taken place were given as the effects of the terms of mineral leases, that the mines were nearly worked-out, that miners were reluctant to pay more to meet the costs of improvements and that the "old style" of many colliery houses rendered repair or renovation difficult.

Overcrowding in coal mining communities was explained by sub-letting, the preference for two-apartment houses, demand for single room dwellings and by the preference for houses with two large rooms rather than several small rooms. The conclusions concerning wages and rent were that the idea was prevalent among miners that rent was a part of the wages, that good wages and a low percentage of wages in rent were not inducements to pay more for houses. Finally as a result of all these problems company houses gave a low return to coal owners. Difficulties associated with company housing alone included the choice of site close to the mines, the habit of constructing rows of single storey cottages and the placing of responsibility on the coal companies to build in order to guarantee a workforce. It was clear from the Commission's report that private enterprise and coal companies were either unwilling or unable to deal with these problems to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The war cabinet accepted that the State would have to provide financial aid for housing in an interim period following the war.⁹⁴ They did not however

⁹⁴ Orbach, L.F., *Op. cit.* p. 58.

envisage a situation in which the government would assume the obligation to provide homes for the working class indefinitely. The Commission was dissatisfied with this position.

"We have come to the definite conclusion that for the housing of the working class the State must accept direct responsibility. But we are also of the opinion that no satisfactory programme of housing can be carried out unless a definite obligation was placed upon some person or Authority to see that a sufficient number of satisfactory houses is provided. It is impossible to place such an obligation on a private individual or a private body of persons. . . The most convenient method, in our view is that the State should impose the obligation on the Local Authorities."⁹⁵

In summary⁹⁶ the members of the Royal Commission concluded that landward local authorities should have the power to form special scavenging and lighting districts without having to receive prior permission from either a parish council or from rate-payers. In the instance of small mining villages the local authorities should have the power to call upon the owners of the houses to arrange cleansing and scavenging facilities to the satisfaction of the local authority. It was also recommended that local authorities should have "power to require the provision of suitable washing accommodation in new houses and in old houses where facilities permit". An impervious floor through the whole extent of the living room was to be considered an essential condition of habitability and that any house without this basic provision was to be treated as a nuisance.

It was further recommended that colliery owners should be entitled to

⁹⁵ Royal Commission 1917, p. 293, cited in Orbach, L.F., *Op. cit.* p. 58.

⁹⁶ Royal Commission 1917, p. 158 Summary of Recommendations 1-14.

renewal of a mineral lease on terms fixed by an arbiter if negotiation failed, and more importantly that colliery owners should in future obtain land required for the erection of workers housing under a feu agreement completely separate from the mineral lease. It was suggested that alternatively there should be a definite valuation of the houses at the expiry of the mineral lease. It was further stipulated that in cases where the proprietor of the land was reletting the minerals to a new tenant and the outgoing tenant had built houses under a leasehold tenure but did not wish to convert them into a feu the houses should be taken over by the superior on termination of the lease.

In instances where the mine was allegedly nearing exhaustion the local authority was to exercise statutory powers regarding housing and if necessary to require the coal owners to provide temporary accommodation until the expiry of the lease or the exhaustion of the mine. Failing this accommodation was to be provided by the local authority at the cost of the coal-owners. In new mines mine-owners were to be permitted to provide temporary accommodation subject to the control of the local authority. In regard to subsidence the superior of the surface was to be entitled to seek relief from the superior of the minerals for compensations in instances of subsidence.

The majority report was not unanimous. A minority report was presented by four members; Baron Lovat, Mrs. Kerr and Messrs. G.F. Barbour and Mr. Charles Carlow of the Fife Coal Company. They were concerned that the project was on too vast a scale to be dealt with by local authorities alone. They proposed that encouragement be given co-operative and co-partnership efforts with the aim of extending owner occupation. They were

also concerned that post-War emergency regulations should be administered as temporary measure.⁹⁷

9.6. Conclusion

The Royal Commission was inclined to place responsibility for living standards in Scottish coal-mining communities at the door of the coal-owners. In their recommendations they were highly influenced by ideals of the garden city movement. A good layout and design and a better environment were necessary before the living standards of the tenants could be improved.⁹⁸ The coal-owners denied responsibility and claimed that the situation was not their sole responsibility. As far as they were concerned the miners themselves contributed to the situation. It was repeatedly asserted by the coal-owners that the miners themselves contributed to the filth of their own areas.

"The indiscriminate keeping of poultry, and the scattering of the contents of ashbins were cited by the architects of the Fife Coal Company as tending to lower the standard of upkeep even in the better rows."⁹⁹

But - as noted by Dr. Dewar in relation to the deposition of domestic rubbish including fish and rotten animal carcasses in ashpits - what else was a housewife to do if there was nowhere else to deposit domestic refuse.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Royal Commission 1917, pps. 355-356, paras. 1-6, Minority Report.

⁹⁸ Royal Commission 1917, p. 418.

⁹⁹ Royal Commission 1917, p.128, para. 882, evidence from Robertson, architect Fife Coal Company Ltd.

¹⁰⁰ Royal Commission 1917, p.129, para. 889, evidence from T.F. Dewar, medical officer for health, Local Government Board for Scotland.

As far as the commission was concerned such situations could only be set right by the raising of standards through education. This could not begin until "congeries of middens, ashpits, and coalpits" were cleared away from the fronts of the houses in the older rows, while higher standards could be stimulated by better design in the future.¹⁰¹ In the effort to raise ideals of improvement and overall standards the Commission made several suggestions, the most important of which were the commitment to State provision of housing for the working class and the extension of the local authorities powers.

"The want of power in the hands of the Local Authorities . . . to regulate the formation and laying out of new villages . . . and of elaborating and devising their general arrangement and distribution before actual building is permitted to be commenced is fraught with a menace to the welfare of the community for a hundred years to come."¹⁰²

The evidence presented to the Commission reflected the respective interests of all parties concerned. The Commission took an overall view of the situation, emphasising education and the raising of standards and aspirations, although the views expressed were not necessarily detached given that several of the members were involved in the coal-mining industry. The witnesses to the commission each had their own local concerns. The medical officers; Drs. Dewar and Dittmar, were concerned with housing condition, sanitation, scavenging and their powers of action. The

¹⁰¹ Royal Commission, 1917, p. 128, para. 882.

¹⁰² 1909, Cd. 5288 Local Government Board (Scotland), Fifteenth Annual Report, XL 447. Dr. Dewar, Medical Inspectors Report XC, p. 172.

representatives of Fife coal-owners, Messrs. Carlow, Robertson, Kirkby and Paul, were concerned with their company's finances, investment in housing and their reasons for erecting one and two room dwellings rather than larger houses. The miners' representatives were concerned with improvements in living standards in coal-mining communities and the rights of colliers to a decent home and freedom of action.

Nevertheless, despite the difference in emphasis reflecting the concerns of individual parties, and the demands for change, residual elements of pre-industrial relations of production prevailed. Both coal-owners and miners clung to familiar traditions such as the provision of housing, and the payment of low rent, in the face of political and economic turmoil.

Chapter 10

**Coal company housing
and
miners' welfare
in
post World War I Scotland.**

"Private enterprise has failed. We cannot - must not - trust private landlords or coal owners. It must be done by the State.

There is a legacy of bad housing, the result of many years of greed, selfishness and ignorance The miner is entitled as a human being to have a good house to live in amidst pleasant surroundings. It is the duty to provide this and I am convinced that the State will find, as some farseeing and humane employers who provide this have found, that it is the best possible investment."¹

10. 1. Introduction

The 1917 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in Scotland examined housing and living conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities and drew national attention to the problems of housing provision for miners. The causes of poor housing were shown to be; poor construction and maintenance, rents and rates, poor sanitary provision, lack of statutory powers to deal with miners housing in landward districts, the mineral lease, and low return for investment. Parallel to such practical difficulties lay problems of social relations of production; the breakdown of labour relations between coal-miners and coal companies and the residual

¹ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. Robertson, page, 348

influence of pre-industrial relations of production, each of which influenced collier and company attitudes to housing provision.

The 1917 Commission, although primarily concerned with housing, inevitably drew attention to problems of management within the Scottish coal-mining industry. Attention was further focused upon management of the industry during the war years. As the war progressed and the need for sustained productivity and output increased, State involvement in and control of, industrial management and labour increased. Coalmining was of great strategic importance to the war effort. Labour unrest and the deep seated antagonisms that evolved in the years leading up to the war were only temporarily relieved by the patriotic fervour of the mining community.² The minimum wage strike of 1912 demonstrated the power of the Miners Federation of Great Britain and the war with its attendant need for maximum production strengthened the miners' bargaining power.

At the commencement of the Great War the policy of Asquith's government was to rely on private enterprise and the law of supply and demand. By 1915 however it had become clear that the war was not to be short-lived as anticipated, and control of industrial production became of paramount importance. The government intervened to ensure adequate supplies of ammunitions, provisions and transport facilities. Initial involvement in the coal-mining industry was tentative however, as the government recognised that the full support of the miners not at the front was necessary to ensure maximum coal production.³ Control lasted from the

² Kirby, M.W., (1977) *The British Coal-mining Industry 1870-1914. A Political and Economic History*. Macmillan, London, p. 24.

³ Redmayne, R.A.S., (1923) *The British Coalmining Industry during the War*, pps. 13-14. cited in Kirby, M.W. *op. cit.* p. 25.

autumn of 1916 to 1921.

The significance of control lay in its effect upon the miners. National control and levelling of profits, led to national wage bargaining and pay increases. No longer therefore could it be argued, by coal-owners and government alike, that a national wage agreement was impossible to implement.⁴ Miners were also for the first time, through their representation on the advisory board to the coal controller and through their participation in pit committees, playing a part in the management of the industry. Access to decision making heightened their aspirations towards nationalisation.⁵

Low productivity in the aftermath of the First World War, poor labour relations and agitation for nationalisation led to the appointment of two Royal Commissions to investigate the coal-mining industry and to suggest directions for future improvement and development. During the build up to nationalisation Britain's coal companies were under severe pressure from all sides, with increasing criticism from government, the press, labour representatives in Parliament and employees alike. Private enterprise management of the industry, including housing provision was scrutinised by the Royal Commissions of 1919 and 1925 and thereby constantly in the public eye. The situation was further exacerbated by the growing strength of the Miners Federation of Great Britain. In Scotland their persistent agitation

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 319.

⁵ A resolution in favour of state control was introduced at the 1894 Annual Conference of the Miners Federation of Great Britain. The idea did not however gain national support until 1906 when the principle of state ownership was accepted by the Yorkshire miners.

from 1892 to 1912 for an enquiry had prompted the Royal Commission on Housing, whilst their involvement in management during the war years fuelled their desire for greater representation and a say in the future of the industry. First muted in 1894 at the fifth Annual Conference of the MFGB demands for nationalisation grew from strength to strength in the post war years. The war had effectively transformed nationalisation of the coal-mining industry from an "abstract idea into a realistic and desirable objective".⁶

Housing remained an important tool in Scottish miners' on-going conflict with coal-owners. Criticism of housing struck at the very heart of the coal industry since poor quality housing had by then become synonymous with bad management. By 1918 miners' housing had graduated from a health and social welfare issue to a strong weapon with which to attack private ownership and management of the industry. Coal company housing provision was therefore levied against the coal-owners in the argument for nationalisation. The coal-owners responded to calls for nationalisation by waging a propaganda war against local government and the miners' union in an effort to convince public opinion that they were doing more for housing the working class than local authorities. It will be shown later in the chapter that Scottish coal companies built houses to the standards of the day in accordance with government regulation and statutes. But they continued to refuse to invest funds in maintenance and renovation of old stock.

The government was all the while concerned about standards of housing and social welfare. By 1914 the safety and welfare of the miners, together

⁶ Kirby, M.W. *Op. cit.* p. 32.

with wages and hours of work were the direct concern of Parliament. Even since Lord Ashley's mines act of 1842 coal-owners had to accept the principle of State intervention.⁷ Nevertheless they continued to fight against legislation which inevitably influenced cost structure and impinged upon the day to day management of the industry.

The years between 1908 and 1914 saw the culmination of the process of State intervention in the coal-mining industry. Catering for the social needs of the workforce, including housing was one means of offsetting industrial unrest. While laying down conditions and standards the government nonetheless continued to believe that it was ultimately the responsibility of the coal companies to cater for and fund the needs of their own workers. The government dictated standards but only provided adequate funds to implement them when under threat of national social disorder. Meanwhile the coal companies had satisfied themselves that the State had accepted responsibility for housing the working class in the 1919 Housing Act, and therefore that the welfare of their workers was no longer their sole concern.

The net result of pre- and post World War One housing legislation was that local authorities either provided housing schemes in mining districts or they authorised coal companies to do so with the aid of exchequer subsidy, but took full responsibility for sewage, water supply and scavenging. It became abundantly clear that coal companies while willing to erect good quality housing, and indeed often eager to do so in view of the findings of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry in 1919, but were reluctant to provide the supporting infrastructure.

⁷ 1842 Mines Act (5 and 6 Vict. c. 99); an Act to prohibit the employment of women and girls in mines and collieries, to regulate the employment of boys and to make other provisions relating to persons working therein.

10. 2. *The 1919 Coal Industry Commission; an indictment of Scottish coal-owners.*

In the aftermath of the First World War productivity in the coal-mining industry declined dramatically from its all-time peak of 1913. Government control of the industry and subsidy on output disguised the figures; from 1914 to nationalisation in 1947 most British collieries were operating at a loss. During the inter war years two Royal Commissions were appointed to investigate the reasons for the fall in productivity; the Sankey Commission of 1919 and the Samuel Commission of 1925.

The Coal Industry Act of 1919 constituted a Commission to inquire into the position of and conditions prevailing in the coal industry.⁸ Attention was to be given to the following areas;

(a) the wages and hours of work of the various grades of colliery workers, and whether, and if so, to what extent and by what method, such wages should be increased and hours reduced, regard being had to a reasonable standard of living amongst the colliery workers, and to the effect of such changes on the economic life of the country;

(b) any inequalities between different grades of colliery workers as regards wages, hours of work, and other conditions and whether and if so, to what extent any of these inequalities are unjustifiable and capable of remedy;

(c) the cost of production and distribution of coal and the general organisation of the coalfields and the industry as a whole;

⁸ 9 Geo. 5. c. 1.

- (d) selling prices and profits in the coal industry;
- (e) the social conditions under which colliery workers carry on their industry;
- (f) any scheme that may be submitted to or formulated by the Commissioners for the future organisation of the coal industry, whether on the present basis, or on the basis of joint control, nationalisation or any other basis;
- (g) the effect of the present incidence of , or practice in regard to mining royalties and way-leaves upon the coal industry and the cost of coal, and whether any and what changes in this respect are desirable;
- (h) the effect of proposals under the above heads upon the development of the coal industry and the economic life of the country.

Although the primary purpose of the 1919 Commission was to investigate the organisation and running of the industry throughout Britain; its management and efficiency, with specific reference to the question of nationalisation, part (e) of the Act authorised the Commission to enquire into the social conditions under which colliery workers carried on their work. Housing was one of the social conditions concerned with the working of the industry, along with working conditions, health, the provision of pit-head baths and clothes drying facilities.

The Commission received evidence in two stages on living conditions in miners' housing throughout Britain from representatives of the miners, coal companies and Medical Officers. In the first stage John Robertson, chairman of the Scottish Union of Mine-workers presented a detailed "proof" on housing conditions in Scottish colliery communities.⁹ In the

⁹ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. (Sankey Commission).

second stage, witnesses included Mrs. Agnes Brown, the wife of a Scottish miner, who provided evidence on hygienic conditions in miners' houses.¹⁰ This Commission was however enacted to examine the industry and not the housing and was made up of representatives of the industry, both management and workers, rather than members specially concerned with housing as had been the case of the Ballantyne Housing Commission of 1917.¹¹ The Commission members did not as a result personally investigate colliery houses as had been the case in 1912-13 with the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland. The report of the Ballantyne Commission on Housing was however used extensively by all participants to illustrate the situation in Scottish collieries and to corroborate and support evidence presented.

Coal company housing was linked to the nationalisation question through the efforts of the witnesses representing Scottish coal-miners. The Miners Federation of Great Britain had pressed for the nationalisation of the coal supply since 1910. Private ownership they regarded as extravagant and wasteful, while joint control was emphatically rejected by the Miners Federation as it was essentially an idea for profit sharing between the combined colliery owners and the miners, put forward by the Mine-owners

¹⁰ 1919 Cmd. 210 XI 305 Second Stage; report by Mr. Justice Sankey, Sir Arthur Ducham and by other members of the Commission (20 June 1919). Vol I Reports and minutes of Evidence.

¹¹ Members of the 1919 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry were; the honourable Mr. Justice Sankey, CBE, (Chairman), Arthur Balfour Esq., Robert Smillie Esq., R.W. Cooper Esq., F. Hodges Esq., Ewan Williams Esq., Herbert Smith Esq., J.T. Forgie Esq., Sidney Webb Esq., Sir Arthur Duckham, KCB MICE, R.W. Tansey Esq., Sir Thomas Royden, Bart. MP and Sir Leo Chiozzo Money. The assessors were Sir Richard A.S. Redmayne KCB, H.J. Wilson Esq. CBE and S.J. Chapman Esq., CBE. Mr. Arnold D. McNair acted as secretary to the commission with Mr. Gilbert Stone as his assistant.

Association. The miners' aims were to gain a reduction in hours, an increase in remuneration and improved arrangements for the miners demobilised following the war.¹² Half a century of education had

" produced in the workers in the coalfields far more than a desire for the material advantages of higher wages and shorter hours. They have now in many cases and to an ever increasing extent, a higher ambition of taking their due share and interest in the direction of the industry to the success of which they too are contributing."¹³

Housing, although not intended for specific attention, nonetheless became an important element in the discussion of wages and standard of living, and the investigation into management of the industry, particularly in relation to Scotland.

The first part of the Commission's investigations concerned wages and hours. The miners demanded an increase in earnings of 30%, in order to attain a higher standard of living.¹⁴ They argued that although miners earned more than other workers, they were employed on average for only 270 days a year. The high wages of coal hewers were repeatedly held up as representative of miners earnings. Hewers in fact represented only one third of all those working in the mines and less than half of those working underground. Most colliery workers received wages lower than hewers. The general average earnings of the whole eleven hundred thousand miners working in Scotland in 1913 was officially given as £82 per annum or 31s. 6d. per week. Their opponents, the representatives of the Mine-owners

¹² SRO WRH CB7/5/40.

¹³ 1919 Cmd. 359 XI 373 Reports and Minutes of Evidence.

¹⁴ 1919 Cmd. 359 XI 373 Reports and Minutes of Evidence.

Association stated that in the September quarter of 1918 average wages were £169, representing an increase of 106% since 1913. They also produced evidence from the "Labour Gazette" of March 1919 which stated that the increase in the cost of living amongst the working class since before the war was 115%. In the case of colliery workers this was reduced because of the fact that "they either receive a supply of coal or the use of a house free of charge or the supply of coal at a reduced rate, and except in rare cases no charge was made in these respects during the war".¹⁵

The miners ventured to assert that "the nation will not consider that this is an adequate wage for a miner, or that it is such to afford the miner's family a proper standard of living".¹⁶ The "poverty" which this implied was, they asserted "strikingly manifested in the house that our civilisation allows to the miner and his family". Here the Miners Federation was specifically referring to the number of Scottish miners living in the "soul destroying conditions of a single-room house" while a large majority occupied no more than two rooms.¹⁷

"Nor can it be said that, except in a few special cases, a mining village, as it exists today, is, in the standard of life that it permits to this not unimportant proportion of the nation's families, a credit to the community. Yet it is in these mining villages that one tenth of all the nations children are born and reared."¹⁸

¹⁵ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. (Sankey Commission).

¹⁶ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. (Sankey Commission).

¹⁷ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. (Sankey Commission).

¹⁸ 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. (Sankey Commission).

John Robertson, Chairman of the Scottish Union of Mine-workers, presented evidence on housing in Scottish coal-mining communities. The subject was introduced in the section reserved for hours and wages since housing was, according to Robertson, an element of the attainment of a better standard of life for miners; defined by him as a sufficiency of food and clothing; education; good housing amidst pleasant surroundings; leisure and recreation.¹⁹ The Mine-owners Association was enraged at such an early introduction of housing but could do little but bide their time and prepare their defence.

Robertson's evidence on housing concerned sleeping accommodation, death rate, infant mortality and the instance of T.B. in Lanarkshire, based upon reports of the Medical Officers of Health for the county, although he presented them as representative of poor housing conditions in mining villages throughout Scotland. The gist of his evidence was that housing conditions in Scottish mining districts were bad; houses were small, most were badly constructed and insanitary, and nothing was done to improve their surroundings. The excuse offered by owners that land for house building was often expensive in colliery districts was refuted since poor housing was as often found in districts where land was cheap as in areas where property was expensive. Robertson also presented an impassioned appeal against living conditions in one room houses; the house type commonly found in coal-mining communities. This evidence was taken from the report of Dr. Russell, the Medical Officer for Health in Lanarkshire

¹⁹ SRO WRH CB7/5/41.

and caused the coal-owners of Scotland great annoyance.²⁰

Under cross examination by members of the Commission and in reply to a statement that when Scottish colliery houses were erected they satisfied the public authorities, and the demands of the miners of the time; very often their being a demand for one apartment houses in preference to two or more apartments, Robertson stated that single room houses were popular only because of limited income, and that the minimum house size should be of three bedrooms, with a sitting room, kitchen, scullery, bathroom and garden.

Various members of the Commission were keen to give credit to newly built houses in colliery communities and objected to coal company housing being singled out for criticism, whereas Robertson argued that colliery housing was as bad if not worse than other working class housing.²¹ The virtues of gardening were raised, as in the 1917 Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland. Newly built houses often had little or no provision for gardening. When asked had not the standard of accommodation provided something to do with the type of tenant, Robertson answered that colliers were as likely to garden as residents of Bournville. In answer to the assertion that any profits the coal-owners made from housing did not warrant further investment in company dwellings and that dividends of seven or eight per cent were insufficient, Robertson stated that;

"Apart from the question of dividend, I think it is the very best possible investment that any employer could

²⁰ SRO WRH CB7/5/40 with reference to Royal Commission 1917, pps. 134-135, para. 926.

²¹ SRO WRH CB7/5/40.

make - to build a good house and give his workmen good surroundings and good food - in fact give him the standard of living of a man, the same as you would give a horse the standard of living."²²

In the event of coal companies refusing to build houses he concluded that it was the duty of the State to do so. He did nonetheless suggest that the houses erected partly with State assistance would not meet requirements since they were not built to the ideal standards of the workers.²³ He concluded that the house of commons, as well as the general public would have to be educated to the ideal.

As stated earlier Scottish coal-owners were enraged by the inclusion of company housing in so early a stage of the Commission's proceedings. In deciding their strategy on how to deal with the criticism they had to consider several questions. Firstly, what was the object or desired effect of providing evidence on housing in Scotland to the Commission? Was it to rehabilitate the coal-owners in the eyes of the general public; to have housing removed altogether for the report; or was the object to prevent the publishing of a report that would entail compulsory expense to the industry? Secondly, and more importantly for the future of the industry, did the housing issue have a bearing upon the future management of the industry and thereby on the question of nationalisation?

The Commission had the power to enquire into housing as a substantive issue since it had been authorised to examine social conditions in the industry. In the aftermath of the detailed report of the Ballantyne

²² Royal Commission 1919, p. 353, para. 9025.

²³ SRO WRH CB7/5/40

Commission of 1917 on the housing of the working classes in Scotland, the coal-owners of Scotland felt that further examination of the industry's housing provision was unnecessary. They had assumed that no further evidence would be called for. However since the 1919 Commission's chairman, Sankey, had accused coal-owners of general ineptitude, they realised that they would have to defend their position.²⁴

As far as the coal-owners were concerned a great deal of sentiment had been introduced to the Commission's proceedings by the miners' witnesses, in an effort to influence public opinion. The principal concern of the Mine-owners Association was to keep the question of colliery housing an entirely separate issue to that of nationalisation, dual control or private ownership of the mines. With this aim in view they attempted to negate any suggestion that poor conditions in some mining communities were the fault of the management of the industry, or that the State should intervene, take over the running of the industry, and nationalise the mines. The logic behind the argument that housing provision was related to management was that coal-owners had to erect housing for their workers to facilitate coal production, and since they were therefore built as a trade necessity company housing had to be examined in an enquiry into the success or failure of private ownership and management of the industry.

The coal-owners split their defence into three parts; firstly, they claimed that standard of miners' housing was not below the level of housing for the general working class population; secondly, standards of colliery housing had been, and still were being raised; and thirdly, housing was in fact a

²⁴ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Notes and suggestions for the assistance of Mr. W. Thorneycroft incoming to a decision regarding the policy to be followed in referring to the housing question.

national issue and therefore a matter for the State and not a question that affected the future management of the industry. They were however taken somewhat off guard when the housing question was raised in an early session of the enquiry reserved for wages and hours. Mr. Robertson's evidence was

" intended to be and was apparently construed by some of the Commissioners as well as by the public to be a formidable indictment of the private ownership of the mines".²⁵

In the opinion of Scottish coal-owners Robertson's evidence, which contrasted conditions of those living in single room houses with those occupying larger dwellings, was an indictment not of them, but of the country as a whole for which no one class of the community could be held responsible.

Scottish coal-owners were particularly aggrieved over Mr. Robertson's evidence based upon the report of the Medical Officer for Health for Lanarkshire. The report was dated 30 June 1910, but according to Robertson represented conditions since then, as he claimed few houses had been built and little repairs carried out.²⁶ To refute this evidence the Coal-owners Association drew upon evidence given in the Report of the Royal Commission on housing in Scotland, published in September 1917:

"While we saw in the Middle Ward of Lanarkshire the most deplorable sanitation in the more neglected "rows", we saw also many signs of an effort after better

²⁵ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Notes and suggestions for the assistance of Mr. W. Thorneycroft.

²⁶ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: with reference to Dr. Wilson's Report, 1910 cited in Royal Commission 1917, p. 90, para. 644.

things, such as the addition of annexes containing scullery, wash-house, and water closet to individual houses, and the replacement of large common ashpits by individual bins. The evidence laid before us by the District Clerk showed that much had been done in recent years"27

The coal-owners also quoted extensively from the 1909 report by Dr. T.F. Dewar, Medical Officer for Health in Fifeshire, as showing evidence of great improvement to housing conditions in coal-mining communities there.

"So far as the essential conditions bearing upon health are concerned, the great majority of the houses inhabited by miners in Fifeshire reach a good or a fair standard. So far as actual house construction is concerned - that is, disregarding for the moment sanitary accommodation such as privies, closets, ashpits, wash-houses - the proportion of miners houses in Fifeshire, to which serious exception could be taken is small, certainly not over 8 to 12 per cent. Those, such as practical sanitarians, whose duties make them most intimately conversant with the general facts, are themselves apt to forget this, since their attention is constantly concentrated, not on the 90 per cent of good or a least habitable houses, but on the 10 per cent which cannot be regarded as reaching this standard. 28

"It may be permissible to repeat that, although emphasis has been laid, and necessarily laid, upon hamlets and areas where the sanitary conditions are very imperfect, yet the great majority of the houses inhabited by miners in Fifeshire attain to a fair standard. Again, while it is depressing to encounter, or to read of, such unwholesome conditions as are reported in detail in extracts given above, yet a perusal of the Public Health Reports of Fifeshire for the past 18 years shows that a steady and continuous progress is been achieved. Every year witnesses the renovation, closure, or demolition of numbers of unsatisfactory dwellings and the erection of a still larger number of houses of modern, and as a rule, of satisfactory type."29

²⁷ Royal Commission 1917, pps. 134-135. para, 926.

²⁸ Royal Commission 1917 p.136, para. 17.

²⁹ Royal Commission 1917 p. 175, para. 44 and SRO WRH CB7/5/40.

The coal-owners presented further evidence of improvements in coal-mining villages by showing photographs of "typical good houses" built by Scottish coal companies and of welfare facilities, such as miners' institutes, bowling greens and picture houses, all provided for the colliers at coal company expense.

Although Robertson's evidence was allegedly based on conditions in Scottish coal-mining communities from 1910 onwards, his statement on conditions in one roomed houses based upon Dr. Russell's report, was in fact written in 1888 and referred to conditions in a Glasgow tenement.³⁰ The coal-owners then produced evidence that defended the construction of one room houses. The provision of one room dwellings was defended as being the accommodation suitable for the two extremities of life; the young married couple and the old or retired couple whose family have left home. It was also allegedly the type of house favoured by miners themselves.

"It is very desirable that the public mind should be cleared of any sickly sentiment as to the supposed evils of one apartment houses"³¹

The Commission had sent a schedule to each coal company asking them to detail demand for particular types of houses, the average number of working males per household and their incomes. According to the returns there was still a demand for single apartment houses in coal communities. These were said to have been occupied by newly married couples and the

³⁰ SRO WRH CB7/5/40.

³¹ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Dr. Wilson's Report 1910, pps. 18-19.

elderly.³² It was also asserted in the returns of Schedule B that in 2.2% of two roomed houses one of the rooms was left unused and in 11.3% one room was sublet to another family or lodger.³³

In answer to the question "Could you let without a bed in the kitchen?" most companies replied that tenants preferred a bed in the kitchen and in some instances would insert one if not already present.³⁴ When asked would the type of house specified by Mr. Robertson, i.e. a three bedroom house with a parlour, kitchen, scullery, bathroom, larder, w.c. and garden, be popular in coal-mining districts, the majority said "no", unless at a small rent.³⁵

There was ample evidence supplied of families with several members working and paying low rent. Households with incomes above normal were occupying low rented accommodation, often when larger houses were available. Further examples were given of single apartment houses occupied by a miner with a seventeen year old working son, and two working daughters, earning 37/- daily between them. Rent, including rates was £3.18 per annum. This family could have lived in a larger house for £12 a year.³⁶ Two families with incomes of £15 and £18 per week occupied single apartment homes. Numerous examples were given of miners earning upwards of 20/- to 22/6 per shift occupying houses with weekly rents of 1/6

³² SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; 1919 Coal Commission Schedule B.

³³ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

³⁴ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

³⁵ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

³⁶ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

while larger houses were available.³⁷ Miners with good incomes living in two roomed houses were also said to apply to move to single apartment dwellings. Another miner when offered a four roomed house refused it as it was too large for his family and he did not wish to buy new bed clothes.³⁸

According to the Commission the average miner was satisfied with a one or two roomed house with scullery. Only about 10% of workers desired a three apartment and scullery house, and beyond that no desire was ever expressed for four or more apartment houses.³⁹

In reference to Fife it was stated that many wished for a better class of house but that these were not available. Again several examples were given of miners preferring to occupy two apartment houses and refusing to take up larger and better accommodation.

"Before the war a miner with three sons earning full standard wages living with wife and daughter in kitchen house at 2/3 weekly refused a new two roomed house with scullery and other conveniences at 5/- weekly rent."

"Another man also with three sons earning full wages living with wife and two children not working living in same size of house refused a new two room and kitchen house at 5/- weekly rent inclusive of taxes."⁴⁰

A further example was given of a Fife miner and household with an

³⁷ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

³⁸ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

³⁹ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

⁴⁰ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

income of £16 per week paying a rent of 6/6 per fortnight refusing to move to a larger house. Several tenants earned £3. 10 per week and lived in houses of 2/3 and 1/6 rent.

All of the examples given were of high income families living in two roomed low rent accommodation. One statement did however add that workers with large incomes living in low rent houses "have been so long used to this class of house that they won't avail themselves of a better class of house". Later in the same statement it is further stated that "larger houses [were] not available and would not be in demand in any event".⁴¹ Similar evidence of miners and their families wishing only to live in one and two apartment houses, and refusing to avail themselves of larger dwellings (if and when available) was given for Ayrshire and the Lothians.

Several remarks must be made on these reports. Firstly the evidence is based on returns by the coal-owners to the Scottish Office prior to the Royal Commission of 1917 on the Housing of the Working Classes. Secondly the remarks made in the schedules were a response to the 1909 reports of the medical officers for health of the Local Government Board on housing condition in coal-mining districts. Thirdly Mr. Robertson presented a submission to the 1919 Commission on the Coal Industry on conditions in Scottish housing and recommended a standard three bedroom house with parlour, kitchen, scullery, larder, bathroom, w.c. and garden. His statements on conditions in mining villages were refuted by the coal-owners to the Commissions of 1919 and 1925.

Since most of the houses in Scottish Coalmining communities were one

⁴¹ SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Statistics File; Schedule B.

and two roomed dwellings the question must be asked in whose interest was it to suggest that all coal-miners preferred this? Coal-owners were reluctant to erect larger houses as they were unlikely to receive an adequate return for capital investment in higher standards of accommodation. Coal-miners living in company property and long established communities were very much influenced by tradition and custom. A miner was allocated a company house when he got married, if one was available. He and his wife raised a family in that house until the children in turn married and left home. Household income was high only when the children were working and living at home prior to marriage. Once they left home the household of coal-miner, his wife and dependents lived off the wages of one earner. Families raised in this fashion saw little point in moving to a larger house for a short period of high income when in a few years they might no longer require the extra accommodation. Miners and their families were conditioned by their social environment to live in one and two roomed houses since that was what was always available, and to expect that this would always be the case. Members of coal-mining communities operated within the limits of the collective community expectations and aspirations. They did not expect larger houses. Instead they expected the coal-owners to provide them with homes and since these were always one and two roomed dwellings they demanded nothing else. The fact that they always lived in two roomed houses, became accustomed to this to the extent that they presumed to continue to do so, did not mean that they ought not be given the choice of, or the right to, better standards of housing.

Coal miners also felt that they were entitled to cheap or free houses. The provision of accommodation was originally part of the hiring contract; an element of the welfare package provided by employers to induce workers to

stay. Usual landlord tenant relations did not prevail. Indeed coal-miners resisted the coal-owners move towards the imposition of an economic rent. Payment of rent was not viewed in strictly economic terms. Miners felt entitled to company housing and could not see why they should have to pay higher rent even for better accommodation.

In 1911 Mr. Charles Carlow, managing director of the Fife Coal Company in response to Dr. Dewar's report on housing and health in Fife, stated in a memorandum to the LGB that;

"There is no doubt that the majority of working men prefer the newer type of house, at the increased rent over what they could get one of the older houses for, but it is to be borne in mind that this state of feeling existed years ago when wages were 2/- a day less than they are now. I am afraid therefore that looking to the increased desire for holidays and pleasure sport, I do not believe that with wages even as they are now 50% above standard, many of the men would be prepared to pay higher rents than they are presently doing".⁴²

There was little doubt that a demand existed for one and two room houses. The danger was however that they could be occupied by a grown family well able to pay for better accommodation. According to the coal-owners the advantage of one room dwellings was that they precluded the taking in of lodgers or subletting. Ample evidence was given to the Royal Commission of 1917 of Scottish coal miners subletting two and three apartment houses. Coal-owners therefore could see little advantage of providing two and three room houses. As far as they were concerned the problem was not one of use

⁴² SRO WRH DD6/1170: Memorandum by Mr. Charles Carlow, Managing Director of the Fife Coal Company Ltd., prepared at the suggestion of John Ross, Esq., LL.D. Dunfermline, on the question of housing accommodation in connection with Fifeshire collieries.

but rather of the abuse of one apartment dwellings.

The cost of erecting houses of the minimum standard suggested by Robertson to the Sankey Commission (a three bedroom house, with a sitting room, a kitchen, scullery and bathroom, plus a garden) was another thorny subject. The cost of twelve houses per acre, (the maximum density suggested by statute) built semi-detached, including water supply, drainage, fencing, garden and roads, but excluding the cost of the land, would have been £15,112 (£1,260 per house) or if built in terraces of eight houses; £12,900 (£1,075 per house). The costs before the 1914-18 War would have reached £6,300 and £5,650 respectively. The coal-owners were also at pains to point out that section 59 of the Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1890 and the Housing, Town Planning etc. Act of 1909 conferred upon local authorities power to erect and alter houses for the use of the working class. In the years between 1890 and 1914 they had however only built 3,484 houses to meet the requirements of a population of 4.75 million people.⁴³ Between 1898 and 1914 the coal companies of Scotland spent £1,280,000 on erecting new houses and £141,000 on renovating and reconstructing old dwellings.⁴⁴

The provision of the vast majority of workers houses was left by local authorities to private speculative builders and investors, supplemented by employers. Speculative building according to the coal-owners required "fair" security of investment and "fair" return for money. Security of investment in property was much impaired by the loss of confidence in building as an investment following the Finance Act of 1909/10. The direct

⁴³ Royal Commission 1917 p.205, para. 392.

⁴⁴ SRO WRH CB7/5/40

result of this and the expense of erecting houses under stringent local authority bye-laws was that building was cut back all over Scotland. (Even when Lanarkshire local authority erected houses they broke several of their own bye-laws). The imposition of higher rents was the only way investors could gain a return for capital expenditure on building. Since most colliers clung to a tradition that they should pay between 1/6 and 2/6 shillings per week for their homes coal-owners regarded it as impossible for them to improve existing houses or to erect new houses larger than two rooms if the miners would not pay more.

"The better class of houses built by coalmasters of recent years does not in the majority of cases show any return at all for the capital employed after paying for repairs and taxes and making provision for redemption".⁴⁵

The proportion of Scottish houses declared by the Royal Commission of 1917 as uninhabitable was 8%; in mining areas the figure was 7%. The Mine-owners' Association therefore claimed that any complaints against miners houses were against those erected in the distant past and were not a fair criticism of company housing as a whole. Indeed Robertson's evidence was based on conditions in Lanarkshire and these according to the coal-owners were not typical of Scotland's mining communities as a whole.

The coal-owners concluded their defence by arguing that no legal or moral obligation rested with any employer, whether the State, coal company or anyone else, to provide houses for their workers. This fact was never contested by the Miners' Federation. The Housing Commission of 1917 had found that the State must accept responsibility for housing the working

⁴⁵ SRO WRH CB7/5/40

class and that it was impossible to place such an obligation upon any individual or private body of persons.⁴⁶ This statement had been signed by both the coal-owners and a representative of the Miners' Federation. In evidence to the 1917 Commission, the miners had also expressed the opinion that they were not in favour of coal-owners providing colliers with homes because of the power such provision gave them over their workers.⁴⁷

We are all desirous of further improvement. No one contends that the conditions of a great many of the houses do not leave much to be desired, but the blame for that state of matters rests not on the mine owners but on the local authority and on the whole community, including the miners themselves".⁴⁸

"Mr. Robertson's indictment, although intended to be and accepted as an indictment of the private management of the mining industry, is really and indictment of public management by the State of the housing problem committed to it by express enactment"⁴⁹

The Mine-owners' Association could therefore claim that criticism of company housing was therefore not warranted by the facts, and rather than an indictment against coal-owners and their management of the mines, was a convincing argument against nationalisation.

The Chairman of the 1919 Commission Mr. Justice Sankey accepted criticism of conditions in coal mining communities as an indictment

⁴⁶ Royal Commission 1917 p. 293, para. 1938.

⁴⁷ Royal Commission 1917, p. 149. para. 991.

⁴⁸SRO WRH CB7/5/40: Notes and Suggestions for the assistance of Mr. W. Thorneycroft, pps. 9-10.

⁴⁹ SRO WRH CB7/5/40:Notes and Suggestions for the assistance of Mr. W. Thorneycroft, p. 6.

against the companies. In his final report he recommended that "parliament be invited immediately to pass legislation acquiring the coal royalties for the State and paying fair and just compensation to the owners". On the evidence presented to the Commission there was no alternative to the principle of State ownership.

"The success of the industry, whether under private or State ownership depends upon productivity and upon everyone doing his best. The alarming fall in output has convinced me that at present everyone is not doing his best. I am not able to say whether this is the fault of the management or of the workers or of both. Each blames the other. The cause must be investigated, but, whatever it may be, it is hopeless to expect an improvement in the present atmosphere of distrust and recrimination."⁵⁰

The housing issue was in the hands of the Local Government Board and in the case of Scotland, the Scottish Office. They were according to Sankey fully alive to the "peculiar urgency of the problem in certain mining districts". He supported Sir Arthur Duckham's statement in paragraphs XI of his report which stated that;

"The general housing conditions of the workers throughout the country leave much to be desired, but it has not been shown that miners have worse houses than other great classes of the industrial population. In many cases miners are badly housed. Some owners have consistently and successfully endeavoured to improve conditions. But for the war, many more suitable houses would have been built."⁵¹

⁵⁰ 1919 Cmd. 210 XI 305 Second Stage; report by Mr. Justice Sankey, Sir Arthur Ducham and by other members of the Commission (20 June 1919). Vol I Reports and minutes of Evidence.

⁵¹ 1919 Cmd. 84 XI 263 Report by Sir A. Duckham, KCB, MICE, 20 June 1919, p. xxiii, para. xi.

Nevertheless Sankey did state that in some mining districts there were houses that were a "reproach to our civilisation" and "no judicial language is sufficiently strong or sufficiently severe to apply to their condemnation".⁵² To appease the mine-owners expenditure on the development of collieries, including the provision of houses, incurred after a fixed date to be agreed was to be repaid with interest at a rate of 6%.

In the interim report published in 1919 the Commissioners drew attention to the problems of surface land and mineral rights being leased separately and with no regard for consequences to either.⁵³ Surface land was let for building purposes without regard to the existence or absence of underground support. When coal was worked underneath houses were often damaged with no recall or compensation. This was stated to not be consistent with the public well-being.⁵⁴ However, despite such difficulties associated with housing in mining districts the report concluded that it had not been shown that the health of miners or their families was worse than workers in other industries.

"It is urgently necessary that the housing of the working classes should be brought into accordance with modern ideas. The older classes of houses should be improved; new houses should be built and a greater number of houses should be provided. Particular attention should be paid to sanitary conditions and considerations affecting the amenities of life. This however is a national question and included all working-class

⁵² 1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry. p. xvii, para. 39 Housing.

⁵³ 1919 Cmd. 84 XI 263 Interim Report by Mr. Justice Sankey, Mr. Arthur Balfour, Sir Arthur Ducham and Sir Thomas Royden (20 March 1919).

⁵⁴ 1919 Cmd. 84 XI 263 Interim Report by Mr. Justice Sankey, Mr. Arthur Balfour, Sir Arthur Ducham and Sir Thomas Royden (20 March 1919).

houses, whether a colliery village or not. We think it regrettable, that the coal trade should, in a matter of a national character and demanding national attention, have been singled out for particular reproach. We are satisfied that as a special industry the colliery proprietors have done much and would, but for the war and the consequent difficulties, have done more with regard to the housing of the workpeople employed".⁵⁵

It is clear from this quotation that several of the Commissioners had accepted the idea that housing was a national question and the concern of the State. Moreover, both the miners and the coal-owners were in favour of the government accepting responsibility for the housing of the working class and particularly for the provision of miners' dwellings. Robertson put forward the ideals of the workers and did not think that nationalisation in itself would improve the housing situation.

" a great change in outlook has come over the workers in the coalfields, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to carry out the industry on the old accustomed lines. The relationship between the masters and workers in most of the coalfields in the United Kingdom is unfortunately of such a character that it seems impossible to better it under the present system of ownership. Many of the workers think they are workers for the capitalist. This is much less likely to apply with the State as owner, and there is fair reason to expect that the relationship between labour and the community will be an improvement upon the relationship between labour and capital in the coalfields."⁵⁶

⁵⁵1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1919, Taken from the report of Messrs. Arthur Balfour, R.W. Cooper, Sir Adam Nimmo, K.B.E., Sir Allan M. Smith, K.B.E. and Mr. Evan Williams, dated 20 June 1919.

⁵⁶1919 Cmd. 360 Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1919, Taken from the report of Messrs. Arthur Balfour, R.W. Cooper, Sir Adam Nimmo, K.B.E., Sir Allan M. Smith, K.B.E. and Mr. Evan Williams, dated 20 June 1919.

10. 3. *The 1925 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry.*

In the aftermath of the Coal Commission of 1919 it was clear to Scottish coal-owners that although they repeatedly protested to the opposite, conditions in colliery villages were seen as an indictment against their management of the industry. Representatives of the coal-miners and their supporters in Parliament were winning the propaganda war over nationalisation and influencing public opinion in their favour. To counteract this the Association of Coal-owners in Scotland repeatedly brought to the attention of the general public their efforts to improve the living standards of Scottish miners. Throughout the early and mid twenties their regularly published newspaper articles entitled "What the Coal-owners Have Done", detailing the number of houses they erected across Scotland, the amount of money they invested in workers' housing and comparing their provision with that of local authorities.⁵⁷

There is some confusion over the exact number of houses built by colliery companies throughout Britain, and in Scotland in the first quarter of the twentieth century. A "*Coal Industry Publication*" of 1925 stated that 88,000 houses were built by coal companies throughout Britain between 1901 and 1924, at a total cost to the industry of £25,000,000.⁵⁸ Provision was at its maximum in 1901 when 5,000 houses were erected, and at its minimum in 1917 when due to the shortages of war only 1,000 company houses were constructed. According to a booklet published by the Coal-owners Association in 1925, entitled "*Housing the Miners in Scotland*" the total for Scotland was 9,783 (Fifeshire 3,219, the Lothians 1,739 and Ayrshire 1,645).

⁵⁷ SRO WRH CB7/5/41: File on Coal Association containing newspaper cuttings and details of publications.

⁵⁸ SRO WRH CB7/10: 1925 Housing of Miners in Scotland.

However each of these figures was crossed out and replaced by 4,120 (Fife), 2,225 (Lothian), 2,105 (Ayr) respectively giving a total of 12,530 houses.⁵⁹ A further publication of the same title, this time published by the Coal-Owners of Scotland, gave the total for the years 1901-24 as 11,556 houses at a cost to the industry of £2,316,980.⁶⁰

The returns of the coal-owners of Scotland to the Coal Commission of 1925 are most likely to give the most accurate details. Here the total of company provision of housing for 1901-24 is given at 15,824. Fife had 4,449 with a further 1,067 in course of construction (5,516), 5,056 for Lanark plus 514 (5,570) and 1,825 plus 176 (2,001) for Ayr. Another table in the same document however gave the total for Fife as 3,219 houses. The figures in this table were also replaced in the original; the Fife total to 4449 and the Scottish total to 13,438. If we take the type written figures given in the submissions as correct, and ignore the subsequent unexplained replacements, Fife's proportion of national Scottish colliery housing provision for 1901-24 was 33.107%. If we add to this the figure for houses contracted for or under construction in 1925 the proportion increases to 34.85%. These and figures like them were used by Scottish coal-owners to defend their commitment to workers' housing and to refute accusations of mismanagement. In 1925 the conditions in Scottish mining villages were again under public scrutiny, this time by the 1925 Royal Commission on the Coal Industry.

In January 1924, Lord Novar, the Secretary for Scotland, received a

⁵⁹ SRO WRH CB7/5/41: 1924: Housing the Miners in Scotland.

⁶⁰ SRO WRH CB7/5/41: 1925: Housing the Miners in Scotland.

deputation of Labour M.P.s for Scotland. The subject for discussion was the "alleged insanitary conditions of houses and their surroundings in the mining areas of Scotland"⁶¹ The deputation emphasised the lack of water closet accommodation, the poor condition of the surrounding ground, roads and footpaths, the insufficient removal of refuse and the general defectiveness of miners' houses. Following this meeting an inspection was made of mining communities in East Lothian by the chief housing inspector of the Board of Health. The report which resulted from this inspection is remarkably similar to those of the Medical Officer's for Health submitted to the Local Government Board in 1909-10. However the inspector reported to the Board of Health that he saw nothing in the three burghs he visited that he would have described as "objectionable".

As in the investigations of 1910-12 leading up to the appointment of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, landward local authorities were contacted to enquire into conditions in their areas and were asked to consider what steps should be taken to remedy any "defects" they found. The information gathered coupled with details from reports of 1924 made by the local authorities' sanitary inspectors was collated by the Board of Health in a memorandum for submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland. According to the report the complaint that local authorities had power to insist on proper roads and foot paths only in areas formed into "special scavenging districts" under section 39 of the Public Health (Scotland) Act of 1897, ran like a "motif" through all the local authorities' submissions. Rateable values in mining villages were frequently too low to warrant such a course of action. The

⁶¹SRO WRH DD6/1130 HO/48/2/1: Memorandum containing information to 31 Oct. 1925, so far as known to the Scottish Board of Health on housing conditions in mining districts of Scotland.

Medical Officer of Health for Fife reported on conditions in mining villages in the Dunfermline District and in Kirkcaldy District, both visited in April 1924.

The 1925 Royal Commission was established to inquire into and report upon the economic position of the coal industry and conditions affecting it, and finally to make any recommendations for the improvement of the industry.⁶² It consisted of only four members, none of whom had any experience of the coal industry. The Chairman, Sir Herbert Samuel was a Liberal politician, Sir William Beveridge was the Director of the London School of Economics, Kenneth Lee was also a Liberal and Chairman of a cotton company and the fourth member, General Sir Herbert Lawrence was a partner in a banking firm. The Commission was deliberately constituted to produce a unanimous report, in order to avoid complications, as with the majority and minority reports of the 1919 Commission.⁶³

Reports of the previous Commissions concerning the industry were used during the 1925 investigation. As a result fewer witnesses were called and less time spent gathering evidence. The Commission did however hold thirty three public sittings for collecting evidence and examined seventy-six witnesses. Representatives of the Mining Association of Great Britain and of the Miners Federation of Great Britain attended the sittings and cross examined all witnesses. The Commission also inspected forty two mines throughout the country selected by the Miners Federation of Great Britain as "offering special ground for complaint on account of hindrances to

⁶² Royal Warrant, dated 5 Sept. 1925.

⁶³ Kirby, M.W., *Op. cit.* p. 76.

output due to inefficient management . . . ".⁶⁴ These inspections were carried out by staff members of the Inspector of Mines Department (acting as Assistant Commissioners), accompanied by representatives of the owners and workers. Members of the commission themselves visited twenty five mines in Scotland, Lanarkshire, Yorkshire and South Wales.

The Commission noted the special circumstances attached to housing in mining districts; the necessity to locate houses close to the undertakings; the erection of houses to last the period of the mining operation; the dereliction of houses when the mine was worked out and the occupants have moved on. In these circumstances the Commission understood that there was no inducement to build good houses at the outset. It was also noted that prior to the comparatively recent legislation of 1919 and 1923 local authorities had little control over the types of houses built in mining districts. The Commission also agreed with the coal-owners that when the end of a mine's productive life was in sight it was uneconomic to build new houses or to renovate old properties in mining villages. In addition to these factors the Commission attributed the "exceptionally low standard of housing which has prevailed in the mining districts of Scotland" to the short lease granted to coal companies by the mineral owners.⁶⁵

The Commission agreed with the Miners' Federation that the information available, especially that on overcrowding, showed that the housing conditions of the miners, particularly those in Scotland, were often very

⁶⁴ SRO WRH DD6/1130.

⁶⁵1926 Cmd. 2600: Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1925), Vol. 1, Chapter XVII - Housing, p. 199.

bad. ⁶⁶ Consideration was given to the cost of living for miners and in particular wages and rent. The Commission stated in its report that the rents of houses provided by colliery companies appear to have risen proportionally more than rents in general.⁶⁷

In Scotland, a survey conducted in 1925 showed that in districts where 20% of the population were engaged in mining, there was a shortage of 17, 635 houses. By October 1925, 14,714 houses had been built with State assistance by local authorities and others (including colliery owners), and without such assistance by colliery owners. Of these 10,144 had been provided by local authorities, 2,927 by colliery companies and 1,643 by other private enterprise. ⁶⁸

The 1925 Coal Industry Commission concluded that the depression in the British coal export trade was part of a general depression affecting almost all European coal producing nations at the time. The excess of supply over demand was a result partly of the impoverishment of customers, partly by the development of new coalfields and partly by the increase in use of substitutes. To a lesser degree the depression was attributed to competition from foreign producers, particularly Germany.

"The coal mining industry, for more than a century the foundation of the economic strength of the country has come under difficult times. This change in fortunes is the result of powerful economic forces. It is idle to attribute it either on the one hand to political unrest or

⁶⁶ Royal Commission 1925, Report, p. 200.

⁶⁷ Royal Commission 1925, Report p. 282.

⁶⁸ Royal Commission 1925, Report, p. 201.

restriction of output among the miners, or on the other hand to inefficiency in the day to day management of the mines".⁶⁹

Nevertheless they could not agree with the mine-owners that little could be done to improve the organisation of the industry without lengthening hours and lowering wages. Nor did they support the Miners' Federation proposals for nationalisation. Instead they recommended the continuation of the industry under private enterprise, but re-organised in the following ways; ownership of the minerals by the State; amalgamation of existing mines; combination of mining with allied industries; more research into new methods of winning coal (with the aid of the State); the formation of co-operative selling agencies; re-organisation of working conditions and wage negotiation. The latter item included, inter alia, the proper provision of houses for the workers as a condition of the mineral lease for all new collieries; the general establishment of pit-head baths; and when prosperity returned, an annual holiday with pay.⁷⁰

The evidence presented to the 1925 Commission is remarkable for its similarity to that presented to the 1917 and 1919 Commissions. Neither the coal companies nor the miners have moved from their entrenched positions and there was no apparent common ground for negotiation. Chapter 2, Section 2.5. outlined the deterioration in labour relations that culminated in the Miners' strike of 1926. The report of the 1925 Commission did not alleviate the situation as its recommendations were

⁶⁹ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XXII- Summary of Findings and Recommendations, p. 232.

⁷⁰ Royal Commission 1925, Report, pps. 234-235.

separated into long-term and short-term, thus giving the government both political and economic difficulties in implementing them.

Some of the Commission's recommendations took early effect, particularly those concerning miners' welfare. The following section describes the provisions for pit-head baths and is followed by a case study from Fife. This and the final section will clearly demonstrate that, despite their protestations to the contrary, Fife coal companies were by the late 1920s reluctant to invest company cash in the housing and welfare provision for their workers.

10. 4. Catering for the welfare of miners; pit-head baths 1917-1930.

"If coal is to be extracted to the welfare of the State then the State should cater for the welfare of the miners"⁷¹

Mining was a dirty occupation and dirt was carried into miners' homes on their clothes and boots which made the condition of miners' houses worse than those of other members of the working class and the lives of their families much harder. Use of pit-head baths was to the advantage and benefit of not only the health and welfare of the miner but also that of his wife and family, particularly if several members of a family worked in the mines. Baths usually consisted of a large high ceiling hall surrounded by cubicles of glazed brick. Each cubicle contained a shower bath, with hot and cold water. Wooden hangers attached to cords were suspended from pulleys in the roof of the hall and each man had his own hanger and could use it as necessary to hang up his clothes. The clothes were thus hung at different levels and were not in contact with each other.

⁷¹ Royal Commission 1919 p. 354, para. 9038

Representatives of the Miners Federation and County Public Health Officers before the 1917 Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland emphasised the need for miners to be able to wash comfortably when they came off duty. Such facilities could be provided either by erecting baths at the pit-head or installing a bath in each miners home. The subject of pit-head baths had come before the House of Commons during the passage of the Coal Mines Act of 1911.⁷² According to the Act, if a majority of two thirds of the workmen employed in any mine demanded the provision of baths and clothes drying facilities at the mine and undertook to pay half the cost of maintenance, including interest on capital expenditure, coal-owners were obliged to provide such facilities, as long as the estimated cost did not amount to more than 3d. per man per week. There was no provision whatever for the compulsory provision or use of pit-head baths. The Royal Commission of 1917 felt however that with the 3d. per man per week clause there was little prospect of pit head baths being provided since the coal-owners regarded 3d. as too little to install and maintain baths.

The Scottish Miners Federation were in favour of compulsory provision although they were equally adamant that baths should be provided in each miner's house. Indeed the Royal Commission of 1917 reported that the strongest advocates of pit-head baths were the Medical Officers for Health and not the miners' representatives. Divergent evidence was presented as to the use made in Fife of public baths near to miners' homes, while colliery owners believed that pit-head baths would not be acceptable in Scotland, but, that greater use would be made of baths in homes.⁷³ Their argument

⁷² 1 & 2 Geo. 5 c. 50.

⁷³ Royal Commission 1919, Evidence; Forgie, 25840; Stevenson, 26204;

was that Scottish miners had a "rooted prejudice" against bathing in a public place or institution. Several of the miners' representatives and public health officials held that baths should be installed in the miners' homes as well as erected at the pit-heads, since washing facilities in the home would benefit the miners' families. The manager of the Wemyss Coal Company in Fife, which was proceeding voluntarily to erect pit-head baths and clothes drying facilities at East Wemyss at the time of the enquiry, stated that there was little enthusiasm among the men for the project, despite the fact that many of them lived several miles from work and had to travel by tramcar to their pits.⁷⁴

The Sankey Commission of 1919 received further evidence on pit-head baths or the lack of them. All four final reports recommended that suitable bathing accommodation should be provided. In the opinion of the 1919 Commission pit-head baths and drying rooms for pit-head clothes should have been provided at every colliery long before then. Fault was felt to lie with both the coal-owners and the miners. In France, Germany and Belgium the provision of spray baths, and the drying and mending of pit clothes was compulsory. The Commission recommended that pit-head baths and clothes drying facilities should be supplied at all collieries as near as possible to the pit-head and suggested the repeal of the proviso to section 77(1) of the Coal Mines Act of 1911 which effectively relieved mine-owners of the obligation to provide pit-head baths if the cost of maintenance exceeded 3d. per week for each person employed. The Miners Federation exerted "strong pressure" to make the use of pit-head baths universal. The

Robertson, 6738, 6837.

⁷⁴ Royal Commission 1919, Evidence; Kirkby, 2787, 7384, 7409.

Commission also suggested that a levy of 1d. per ton be placed on coal output to be used as a welfare fund and that this should initially be used to provide pit-head baths. This they hoped would do much to improve housing conditions and health, lead to cleaner homes and prevent men travelling home from work in wet clothing.⁷⁵

In his final report Justice Sankey recommended that the Home Secretary should amend or appeal Section 77 of the Coal Mines Act of 1911 since this had the effect of relieving mine-owners of the obligation to provide pit-head baths if the cost of maintenance was estimated to exceed 3d. per man per week. The Commission was of opinion that baths and clothes drying facilities should be provided and maintained at all collieries and hoped that the removal of Section 77 would render such provision universal to all collieries. Arthur Duckham, in his report to the Commission recommended that the 1d. per ton levy proposed in Sankey's interim report be used in the first instance for setting up pit-head baths and drying rooms. Pit-head baths and drying rooms should, he said, have been the rule long ago. Their provision he hoped would do much to improve housing conditions.

The Miners Welfare Fund was created under section 20 of the Mining Industry Act of 1920, following the recommendation of the Sankey Commission.⁷⁶ The fund, constituted for "purposes connected with the social well-being, recreation and conditions of living of workers in or about coal mines and with mining education and research" was derived from a

⁷⁵ 1919 GOV H30 Cmd. 360, Evidence before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1919, p. xviii, para. 40.

⁷⁶ 10 & 11 Geo. 5. c. 50 and Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 203.

levy of one penny per ton of output and yielded about one million pounds a year.⁷⁷ It was originally intended to last a period of five and a half years but was extended for a further five years by the Mining Industry (Welfare Fund) Act of 1925.⁷⁸ Around 67% of the amount allocated was spent on recreation; the erection of miners' institutes, bowling greens and sports grounds and another 31% was spent on health care, including the erection of pit-head baths and convalescent homes. The remainder of the fund was spent on research into safety in mines by the Safety in Mines Research Board. The duty and power of allocation of money from the fund was vested in the Miners Welfare Committee appointed under sub-section 3 of section 20 of the 1920 Act. Amendments in section 1 of the Mining (Welfare Fund) Act of 1925 and section 15 of the Mining Industry Act of 1926 provided for the transfer of the royalties welfare levy directly to the miners' welfare fund.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, despite all of these advances and recommendations, the Samuel Commission of 1925 felt that a lot more still remained to be done. Pit-head washing facilities were provided at only a small minority of collieries throughout Britain. The Commission was concerned with the detrimental effect of the absence of bathing to health and hygiene on the miners, cleanliness in the home, the difficulties for wives and the moral effects upon children of communal bathing in the kitchen. The proviso concerning pit-head baths under section 77 of the Mines Act of 1911 was still in effect which effectively rendered the section a "dead letter" since in the post war years 3d. per week barely covered interest on the capital cost of

⁷⁷ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 203.

⁷⁸ 15 & 16 Geo. 5. c. 80.

⁷⁹ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, pps. 203-204.

erecting pit head baths let alone maintenance.⁸⁰ Apart from the question of finance and prejudice from older miners the only objection the Commission could find to pit-head baths was that of time taken to change clothes on arrival at the pits. This could not be regarded as a serious drawback. There were also no ill effects upon the health of the workers. The Ministry of Health and the Scottish Board of Health and doctors who attended collieries were all entirely in favour of the installation of pit head baths.

In an effort to reduce costs of installation and maintenance, grants were provided from the welfare fund. Interest on the amount of the grant was not taken into account in calculation of the cost of maintenance. This stipulation nonetheless failed to bring the cost of maintenance below 3d. per worker per week, and would not have done so even if the welfare fund met the entire cost. As a result colliery owners were in 1925 still not obliged to provide their workers with washing and drying facilities. In 1924 the Labour government attempted to redress the situation by introducing a Bill which demanded that every colliery owner provide sufficient and suitable bathing accommodation within a period of three months. However, the Secretary of Mines had the power to exempt from this regulation any mines where coal seams were likely to shortly become exhausted or where there was an inadequate water supply. Parliament was dissolved before this regulation came into effect and the Bill lapsed before its second reading.⁸¹

In 1925 the Miners Welfare Committee reported to Parliament that nearly

⁸⁰ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 204.

⁸¹ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 205.

£116,000 had been allocated from the welfare fund for the installation of pit-head baths at seventeen mines.⁸² By the end of 1924 only thirty pits throughout Britain had been equipped with baths for the miners and another twenty had such accommodation for oversmen, firemen, deputies and examiners. Ten of these were in use by over four hundred men on a daily basis, while four others were used on average by one hundred a day. This accommodation was sufficient for 20,000 men, only 2% of those employed in the industry throughout Britain.

While British coal owners and various governments in the mid nineteen twenties were arguing over the necessity or not to provide pit-head washing facilities the rest of the coal mining world had been providing this accommodation for miners since the turn of the century. In Germany the law relating to the provision of pit-head facilities and their use varied from State to State, but were for the most part obligatory; indeed in Westphalia their use had been compulsory since 1900. Throughout Germany the cost of installation was borne entirely by the coal companies, while in some parts of the country where the use of baths was optional companies sometimes insisted that miners use them as a condition of employment.⁸³ In Belgium, the provision of pit-head baths became obligatory in 1913, although many of the mines already had pit-head bathing facilities on site. In France washing facilities were compulsory while both there and in Belgium their use by the men was optional. In the United States of America their provision was not universally compulsory although the installation of wash and change houses was required by law in Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Montana,

⁸² Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 205.

⁸³ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 205.

Oklahoma and Pennsylvania. In other States they were provided when so requested by a particular proportion of the miners. And finally, in New Zealand, pit-head baths were compulsory if more than fifty miners were employed if thirty per cent requested them and the total cost was again borne by the industry.⁸⁴

The recommendation of the 1925 Commission was supported by the Institute of Mining Engineers. Dr. J.S. Haldane, President of the Institute and Chairman of the Health Advisory Committee of the Secretary of Mines drew attention to another issue involved; that of the appearance of miners when they rose from the pits.

"I think it is very undesirable that miners should come away from a pit like a horde of, well, rather doubtful looking characters. They are all black. You might imagine they were a lot of wild men, but if you know them you know they are the best of people . . . And the public do not like this . . . ; they think they are dangerous characters . . . It tends to cut off the miner from the rest of society . . ."⁸⁵

The Coal Industry Commission of 1925 paid a great deal of attention to such matters since one of their stated aims was to render conditions in the industry such as to

"enable men, of the standard of education and intelligence of the mining population of the present generation, to engage in it without loss of self-respect"⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, pps. 205-206.

⁸⁵ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, pps. 206-207.

⁸⁶ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII, Welfare, p. 207.

The Commission concluded that the movement for the installation of pit-head baths was fully justified, and that their provision in every coalfield was a matter of great importance and urgency;

"We are convinced that the effect upon the health and comfort of the miners, upon the well-being of their wives and families, and therefore upon the general contentedness of the population, would be so considerable as to make this a subject which should engage immediate and effective attention".⁸⁷

The implementation of this course of action was hindered only by the question of capital cost. The fourth report of the Miners Welfare Committee estimated that the cost of installation, excluding the value of the sites (which were generally provided by the coal companies) was in excess of ten million pounds, or eleven pounds per man accommodated. They did however suggest in an earlier report that money could be saved if the stipulations concerning use of the baths became more "elastic"; i.e. if double shifts were in operation fewer cubicles need be provided and the baths would be in use twenty four hours a day.⁸⁸

However, despite their commitment to the provision of pit-head washing facilities, the Commission was adamant that large amounts of money should not be spent in areas where the mines had a short life expectancy. Only collieries with a probable life expectancy of not less than fifteen years were to be encouraged to provide baths. There was no question of making the use of pit head baths compulsory as it was in many parts of the continent; it was neither necessary, nor "for financial reasons" practicable,

⁸⁷ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII, Welfare, p. 208.

⁸⁸ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII, Welfare, p. 208.

to make provision universal. The Commission ultimately considered that if four million pounds were allocated over a period of ten years all the "urgent necessities of the case would be met".⁸⁹

Once again the government was concerned with the health of miners and recommended improvements in standards of health and hygiene, and once again they stopped short of providing adequate financial support to implement these recommendations. Since pit-head baths were part of the necessary fixtures of a colliery the government believed that the obligation for their provision and maintenance lay with the owners and managers of the mines. In this they were supported by the system already operating in other mining countries. However, they did recognise that in the economic climate of 1925, with poor industrial relations and low productivity, it was unlikely that coal companies would provide pit-head washing and clothes drying facilities from company funds. The burden therefore lay with the Miners Welfare Fund. Since its resources were already stretched to the limit the 1925 Coal Commission suggested that the income of the Fund should be increased by required contributions from mineral owners. The report of the Commission stated;

"A mineral owner has a moral obligation to aid the well-being of the population that works his minerals, in the same way that a landowner has a moral obligation towards the population that works on his estate".⁹⁰

This was to be realised by placing an additional charge of 5% upon royalties, to the benefit of the Welfare Fund, which averaged out at a farthing per ton

⁸⁹ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII, Welfare, p. 209.

⁹⁰ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII- Welfare, p. 209.

produced. Such a payment would yield £250,000 per annum.⁹¹

"In view of the fact that their income from royalties is largely dependent upon the labour of the miners, it is legitimate to require them to join them in the measures which are regarded as necessary for the miners' well being."⁹²

So the situation has come from full circle between the reports of the two Royal Commissions on the Coal Industry of 1919 and 1925. Both were initiated to investigate productivity and working conditions in the coal-mining industry, and both were required to make recommendations as to the future improvement in each area. Yet they came to different conclusions. The Sankey Commission of 1919 recommended the nationalisation of the coal-mining industry and that the State should take responsibility for housing and welfare for miners. The Samuel Commission of 1925 recommended that the industry should stay in private hands with part ownership by the State and that coal companies should take responsibility for the welfare of their workers.

10. 5. The Fife Coal Company Ltd. and pit-head baths.

In August 1929 the Miners Welfare Committee contacted the Fife Coal Company suggesting the installation of pit-head baths at the company's collieries, commencing with the Aitken pit in West Fife.⁹³ The company responded favourably and indeed was very keen to have such facilities, although it recommended that the baths should initially be installed at

⁹¹ Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 209.

⁹² Royal Commission 1925, Report, Chapter XVIII-Welfare, p. 209.

⁹³ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 12 Aug. 1929 from the Miners' Welfare Committee to the Fife Coal Company.

Francis Colliery at Dysart in south east Fife. Despite the company's reputation for progression and advanced mechanisation this was the first of the company's pits to have baths installed. The company suggested Francis Colliery as a suitable location since it drew its men from a wide radius and it would help the colliery "tremendously" if they had proper washing facilities.⁹⁴ The men who worked Francis colliery were also in unanimous support of the scheme. The company regarded Wellsgreen colliery in West Fife as "quite out of the question" since there was not "sufficient life in the colliery to warrant bath installation there".⁹⁵ The Welfare Committee had no objection to transferring their offer to Francis colliery and proceeded to arrange a preliminary investigation while suggesting that the company take a vote of the men.⁹⁶ In the ballot of the 910 men working at Francis, 718 voted and of these 625 were in favour of the installation of the baths and only 28 were against (there were 6 spoiled votes).⁹⁷ With this majority of 538 in favour of the project the Welfare Committee went ahead with arrangements. In October 1929 the Committee Adviser and Section Architect visited the colliery and met the colliery engineer, surveyor and representatives of the miners. A committee of trustees was then appointed to oversee the installation and to liaise with the welfare committee. The

⁹⁴ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 24 Aug. 1929 from Charles C. Reid to the Miners' Welfare Committee.

⁹⁵ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 21 Aug. 1929 from Charles C. Reid to Charles Augustus Carlow.

⁹⁶ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 26 Aug. 1929 from the Miners' Welfare Committee to the Fife Coal Company.

⁹⁷ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 7 Sept. 1929 from N. Mc Arthur to Charles C. Reid.

members were all local men from Dysart.⁹⁸

The colliery owners were obliged to comply with certain conditions in the provision of pit-head baths. Firstly, they had to provide a suitable site and pay for the cost of levelling and the removal of any existing plant or buildings. Secondly, the company had to make adequate arrangements with the workmen for meeting the cost of upkeep. No assistance was available in this matter from the welfare fund and no scheme could proceed until subsequent maintenance was assured. The arrangement between the company and the men had to ensure a sufficient permanent income to meet the whole of the annual expenditure and periodic decoration, repair and insurance, necessary for the operation of the baths.⁹⁹

The company were of the opinion that the cost of levelling the site should be the responsibility of the Miners Welfare Committee as they regarded this as part of the cost of installation and not of site provision.¹⁰⁰ However they were unsuccessful in this regard. As regards the second stipulation, Charles Carlow, managing director of the company was said to be "especially anxious" to be assured that the company had documentary evidence to show that the workers at Francis would meet the cost of upkeep etc. before the work on construction commenced; "I hope we are not going to be landed with a permanent contribution to the maintenance apart from

⁹⁸ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 11 Sept. 1929 from N. McArthur to the Miners' Welfare Committee.

⁹⁹ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letters dated 11 Sept. 1929 and 18 Oct. 1929 from N. McArthur to C.C. Reid.

¹⁰⁰ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 11 Sept. 1929 from N. McArthur to C. C. Reid.

labour, coal etc. . . . "101

"In other words he wishes to be assured that the company will not be called upon to meet any expenses following on the installation"¹⁰²

In November 1929 the miners agreed to pay 4d. per week towards the maintenance of the pit head baths. The same amount was paid by the miners at nearby Lochhead Colliery, the property of the Wemyss Coal Company.¹⁰³

As was the usual practice in house construction local contractors were contacted to submit tenders for the project. These included R. Terras a building contractor in East Wemyss, Menzies, Smith and Balfour from Kirkcaldy, Street and Co. Dunfermline, and finally for the brick needed the company's own brickworks at Kelty. (Although the estimates submitted from the Methil, Wemyss and Balgonie brickworks were the keenest there was never any doubt but that the Fife Coal Company brickworks at Blairadam near Kelty would get the contract). The Miners Welfare Committee decided in favour of the lowest tender submitted; that of R. Terras of east Wemyss. The baths were to be constructed over a nine month period at a total cost of £12733.9.9 (£12021.15.1 for the baths and £711.14.8 for the canteen).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 18 Oct. 1929 from N. McArthur to C. C. Reid.

¹⁰² SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 18 Oct. 1929 from N. McArthur to C.C. Reid.

¹⁰³ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 27 Nov. 1929 from C.C. Reid to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹⁰⁴ SRO WRH CB3/171: List of tenders received 11 July 1930.

While everything appeared to be running smoothly at this stage, complications and difficulties soon arose. The Mines Department was concerned about the duration of the mineral lease, due to run for another 36 years, since this was not of sufficient duration to warrant the granting of committee funds.¹⁰⁵ It was therefore suggested to the Trustees of the baths that they take out a 99 year lease with the ministry of agriculture. A further problem concerned the water in the district. The supply was extremely hard, prompting the committee to ask the company to meet the cost of either installing a water softener or of diverting water from the public supply.¹⁰⁶ In both of these areas the company had no choice but to acquiesce.

By February 1930 plans were produced for 57 bath cubicles and 864 pairs of lockers to provide accommodation for 864 men. The canteen costs were estimated at £750 including £100 for equipment and the cost of a section of baths reserved for officials was estimated as £730.¹⁰⁷ The miners welfare fund however would not meet the latter cost as their brief was to cater for the needs of the miners and not company officials. The committee suggested that the company apply to the Fife and Clackmannan District Welfare Committee to meet the cost of the canteen from district instead of national funds.¹⁰⁸ This application met with little success. The welfare

¹⁰⁵ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 11 Nov. 1929 from the Mines Department to the Fife Coal Company.

¹⁰⁶ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 9 Jan. 1930 from the Architect, Mines Department to the Fife Coal Company.

¹⁰⁷ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 12 Feb 1930 from the Mines Department to the Fife Coal Company, enclosing a plan for the scheme.

¹⁰⁸ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 15 Feb. 1930 from the Fife Coal Company to the District Committee of the Miners' Welfare Fund,

committee of the Fife, Clackmannan, Kinross and Sutherland district were not prepared to entertain a proposal for a grant for the officials' section but agreed to consider applying money for the canteen subject to developments at Blairhall colliery where a similar canteen had recently been installed.¹⁰⁹ The Fife Coal Company was somewhat put out that the provision of their canteen was to be subject to the turn of events at Blairhall, and were as a result decidedly reluctant to proceed any further in the matter.¹¹⁰

The company accepted all the costings except those for the officials' section, feeling either that the figure was too high or the proposed plans were too elaborate. The mines department as a result reduced the estimate to £600 for the officials' section, but stated that as a result the section would be inferior to the remainder of the building.¹¹¹ By then the company had concluded that since the officials' section was not to be funded by the welfare committee they would prefer to scrap the entire section and make what arrangements they deemed appropriate for company officials.

By April 1930 however, the company had changed its mind and went ahead with the provision of the baths for the men and the canteen, in the hope that the district fund would pay for the latter. A further dispute however arose concerning the level at which the baths were to be erected. The

Dunfermline.

¹⁰⁹ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 28 Feb. 1930 from the District Committee of the Miners' Welfare Fund, Dunfermline to the Fife Coal Company.

¹¹⁰ SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 19 March 1930 from N. McArthur to C. C. Reid.

¹¹¹ SRO WRH CB3/171: Note dated 22 April 1930.

Welfare Committee suggested 154.00 O.D. while the company was in favour of 160.00 O.D. since it seemed "a pity to place such a building at a low level where it would not be seen to advantage". Once however it was pointed out that this would entail greater expense the company decided in favour of 154.00.¹¹²

10. 6. Improvements to houses at Leven, 1927-1935.

On 5 October 1927 Alex Dewar, Town Clerk, Leven, wrote to the Fife Coal Company to say that the Council was pressing to have the plans for improvements to houses at Carlow Place and Aitken Place, Leven carried out and to request notification of what the company proposed to do in carrying out the work.¹¹³ Charles Augustus Carlow replied on 24 October to say that the company was unwilling to go to much expense with these old houses because of the unsatisfactory development of Leven Colliery in the meantime; "If the position in the pit does not improve there is little use, from our point of view, of spending much money on the old houses".¹¹⁴

Dewar was then requested by the Council to ask the company to state the period within which a definite decision would be made, as the Council was not prepared to permit the situation to continue indefinitely.¹¹⁵ Carlow then

¹¹² SRO WRH CB3/171: Letter dated 5 May 1930 from Charles Augustus Carlow to C. C. Reid.

¹¹³ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 5 October 1927 from Alex C Dewar, Town Clerk, Leven, to William Walker, Secretary to the Fife Coal Company.

¹¹⁴ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 24 October 1927 from Charles Augustus Carlow to A.C. Dewar.

¹¹⁵ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 14 November 1927 from A.C. Dewar to Charles Augustus Carlow.

ascertained the cost of the improvements from the company architect D.W. Robertson. Robertson stated that the original plan had been to convert every two houses into one , but that new plans to give a w.c. to each house would be more economical. There were no alterations to the upper floors of the houses bar the addition of the closets, but on the ground floors the layout would have to be reversed to accommodate new plumbing. This was expected to cost in the region of £50 per house.¹¹⁶ As far as Carlow was concerned "£50 per house was fully more than anticipated" and he undertook to try to get the local people to defer the matter.¹¹⁷

In March 1928 the Town Council wrote again, this time the Sanitary Inspector and Burgh Surveyor. He had been given final instruction by the Town Council to take action if the Company did not respond by 6 March.¹¹⁸ On 6 March, the Sanitary Inspector wrote again to say that the Council was considering the situation and would not press the matter if the company would give an undertaking to begin the work within six months.¹¹⁹ Carlow then requested the company architect to once again communicate the expenditure involved in equipping the houses to the standard required by the Council. Robertson replied that the renovation to eight block would cost about £1438. Carlow also sent a note to Mr. A Haxton in the company's

¹¹⁶ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 7 December 1927 from D.W. Robertson to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹¹⁷ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 10 December 1927 from Charles Augustus Carlow to D.W. Robertson.

¹¹⁸ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 2 March 1928 from Robert J. Wigston, Sanitary Inspector and Burgh Surveyor, to the Fife Coal Company.

¹¹⁹ SRO WRH CB3/210: Letter dated 6 March 1928 from R.J. Wigston to the Fife Coal Company.

accounts office to ascertain the amount of profit or loss for the houses concerned after deductions for repairs. Haxton replied that the company had one house rent account for houses at Carlow Place, Aitken Place, Crossroads, Jordan Terrace, Methilhill and Methil. The rent surplus for all of these houses for the previous year of 1927 had been £1200. He went on to say that as half of the houses were in the Leven Burgh where the rates were a good deal lower than those at Buckhaven Burgh, he would attribute half of the profit to the Carlow Place and Aitken Place houses. This is interesting as it is the only time in all of the company's records, and indeed in the evidence presented to the three Royal Commissions, that it has been revealed that the company made a profit from their houses. Up to this company houses have been portrayed by the Coal-owners Association as a drain on resources. If a company could make a surplus on old houses, viewed by the Town Council as in need of immediate renovation, then how much did they make from newer houses?

Once Carlow had all of this information he wrote again to the Sanitary Inspector, this time to say that the houses did not lend themselves to addition or structural alteration as the cost was prohibitive. He also for the first time introduced the question of rent increases, saying that the application of the allowances authorised by the Rent Restrictions Act would mean very heavy increases for the tenants.¹²⁰

The company's next move was to use rent increases as a means of inciting the tenants to object to the renovations. On 3 April 1928 Charles Augustus Carlow contacted Robert Stewart, a mines agent to arrange an interview

¹²⁰ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 27 March 1928 from Charles Augustus Carlow to R.J. Wigston, Sanitary Inspector.

with some of the Aitken and Carlow Place tenants to discuss the renovations. On 12 April he contacted him again to say that the matter must not lie in abeyance too long, as otherwise the Town Council may move on the matter".¹²¹ By 20 April the company had consulted the majority of the tenants involved and found that 58 were satisfied with the sanitary conditions they already had, rather than pay increased rent and that only two tenants were in favour of the renovations.¹²² In spite of the tenants' opposition however, the Town Council decided to continue pressing for the improvements. The greatest pressure came from Bailie Gallagher, the Socialist member. Carlow meanwhile advised the mines agent that those tenants who voted against the renovations must not "allow themselves to be weakened in their attitude".¹²³

After gaining the support of the tenants the Company then turned its attention to sympathetic members of the Council. On 22 May 1928 Charles Augustus Carlow wrote the following letter to William Low Esq., LLD of Blebe, Cupar, Fife;

"Private and Confidential"

Dear Dr. Low,

I had hoped to see you and have a short conversation on a certain subject, but no opportunity having arisen, I take the liberty in writing.

¹²¹ SRO WRH CB3/201: Note dated 12 April 1928 from Charles Augustus Carlow to Robert Stewart, Mines Agent, Leven Colliery.

¹²² SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 20 April 1928 from Henry Easter and James Pentland to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹²³SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 11 May 1928 from Charles Augustus Carlow to R. Stewart, Mines Agent.

Our Leven colliery has for 2 or 3 years been in rather distressed circumstances, and we have spent a very large sum of money reconstructing it, endeavouring to keep it going. It is still losing heavily, but ultimately I still hope to be able to bring it round for the good not only of the shareholders, but of the whole community in the district.

While that is the position, the Leven Town Council are pressing that the houses attached to the colliery in the Burgh of Leven should have improved sanitary arrangements at a cost of several thousands pounds. At last election a Socialist majority was appointed to the Council, and by the narrow majority of 5 to 4, they threaten legal proceedings unless we carry out these improvements. There is no ill health, no epidemic and no urgency in connection with the cases, but it appears that one of the Socialist candidates raised the question as an election cry to get votes.

Throughout the County generally, I think you will agree there is a truce in connection with expenditure on old houses. The Coal Companies' efforts to meet the situation in recent years have been realised, and the depression in the industry and the closing of so many collieries are causing reasonable people to stay their hand in connection with such improvements.

If you agree with me so far, this is where I wish to find out if you can help me. There is a majority of one in the Council pressing this matter, and if one out of that majority were influenced, the matter would drop. One of these is Mr. Henry Lawrie, who, I understand, is Liberal organiser in the East Fife Division. I understand he does not hold a very strong opinion on the question, but is rather influenced by the others who are pressing the question. No doubt a single word from you advising Mr. Lawrie that he might consider whether it would not be wiser to defer the matter till a more convenient season would turn the balance, and I taking the liberty of asking whether you think you could see your way to making such a gesture.

If there is any further information which can be given, or if you would rather that I came to see you I shall be glad to do so, but this matter is of some importance, and has been raised at a very inconvenient time.

Signed: Charles Augustus Carlow.

P.S. It might also be added that the tenants are making no complaint. On the contrary 58 out of 60 have asked that nothing be done if it is going to mean an increase in rent and rates, which naturally would be the logical consequences of the improvements."¹²⁴

Low was sympathetic with Carlow views on not been pressed to put capital expenditure on houses that seemed to serve their purpose. He undertook to do anything he could in the matter, but could not guarantee the outcome as Lawrie was "rather a difficult individual".¹²⁵

On 1 June 1928 Low again wrote to Carlow, this time enclosing a copy of the letter he sent to Lawrie on 25 May . Low expressed the wish that Lawrie would take a reasonable view of the position when the matter next came up for discussion in the Council. The also suggested that Carlow destroy the enclosed letter.¹²⁶ The letter of 25 May to Lawrie was not destroyed. In it, in addition to outlining the situation much as Carlow had done on 22 May, Low stated

"I do not urge that the treatment of the houses in question should be finally shelved, but think the matter should be delayed until the Company are in a better position to tackle reconstruction or new building. It appears that the tenants are not dissatisfied and would have to find houses at a very big rent relatively."¹²⁷

¹²⁴SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 22 May 1928 from Charles Augustus Carlow to William Low Esq, LLD.

¹²⁵ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 24 May 1928 from W. Low to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹²⁶ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 1 June 1928 from W. Low to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹²⁷ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 25 May 1928 from W. Low to Mr. Henry

Nothing more was said on the subject until October 1928. By then the Town Council had served notices on the company for the renovation of Nos. 1-86 Aitken Place and Nos. 1-80 Carlow Place, and the company was arranging for a petition to be taken around the tenants for presentation to Leven Town Council. The petition was to be presented by the occupiers of the houses, "altogether apart from the company". In November the Council agreed to withdraw the notices if the company provided water closets for 32 houses immediately and agreed to deal with the remaining houses as soon as practicable. The Council also proposed the addition of sculleries as well as water closets.¹²⁸ The cost of adding sculleries was expected to double the expenditure required. The increase in rent resulting from all of the renovations was therefore likely to be £8 per annum, or 3s. a week excluding rates. This was the maximum allowed by the Rent Restrictions Act and would cover the cost of the interest on a bank loan taken out for the project. The coal company was concerned that the tenants would plead that they could not afford the increase and would find cheaper accommodation, leaving the Leven houses empty, and the company with no means of gaining the income to cover the loan. As the Leven colliery was losing money at the time, the company did not want to lose capital expenditure on the houses as well. ¹²⁹

The company solicitors advised the Fife Coal Company to do what was

Lawrie.

¹²⁸ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 3 Nov. 1928 from D.W. Robertson to W. Walker, Secretary, Fife Coal Company.

¹²⁹SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 20 Nov. 1928 from Charles Augustus Carlow to F.T. Wallace, Solicitor, British Linen Bank, Leven.

necessary, but only in stages. It also suggested that the company

" . . . clear out all tenants who are not in your employment and who are in arrears beyond a certain maximum. This should give you sufficient houses to house the tenants of one block and enable you to proceed with the improvement of that block at the least expense and with the least delay. When and as blocks are finished the tenants for the improved houses should be carefully selected and any tenants who fail to rise to the new conditions ruthlessly cleared, as it will perhaps be recognised finally that it is bad tenants who make slum conditions."¹³⁰

In December 1928 the Sanitary Inspector again requested to know when the work would commence. At the time the company was experiencing difficulties in removing the tenants. The Sheriff refused to grant orders of ejection in some cases as he considered that the need for houses overrode the necessity for improvements called for by the Council. The company was eventually advised to start work on some of the houses as fifteen were already empty, in order to prevent action by the Town Council.¹³¹

In February the Leven Sanitary Inspector was described as being "on the warpath" as work had only been commenced on four houses.¹³² These four were the only houses improved in 1929. In 1930 the Fife Coal Company produced revised plans for the alterations they were prepared to carry out. These were approved by the Council and the proposed alterations were

¹³⁰ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 23 Nov. 1928 from F.T. Wallace, British Linen Bank, Leven to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹³¹ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 11 January 1929 from W. Walker to C. C. Reid, General Works Manager.

¹³² SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 4 Feb. 1930 from W. Walker to C.C. Reid.

expected to commence immediately.¹³³

In 1931 the matter was again before the Leven Town Council.¹³⁴ At the February meeting Bailie Gallagher reminded the Council that the year before Charles Carlow Reid, Manager of the Fife Coal Company had met with the Council and had promised to state the company's position on the subject of the Leven houses by the end of the year. He also reminded the Council that Mr. Reid had "held it over the heads of the Council that if they forced the hands of the Company at the time the Leven pit would be closed". Rather than see men out of work the Council stayed its hand. He then proposed that the Council serve notices on the company to carry out the letter of the law and to secure for the tenants the sanitary conveniences to which they were entitled. The Council had been patient long enough and unanimously agreed to serve the notices.¹³⁵

Notices were served under Section 246 of the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1892 throughout 1931 and 1932. In each case the company was given one month to renovate the houses concerned. Since they failed to comply with the requirements they were deemed liable for penalties under Section 24 of the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1903 and were served with a summons to court in March 1932.¹³⁶

¹³³ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 11 March 1930 from R.J. Wigston, Sanitary Inspector to W. Walker.

¹³⁴ Members of the Council were; Provost Barrow, Bailie Gallagher, Bailie Wallace, Councillors Aitken, Baird, Lawrie, Mackie, Nairn and Watson.

¹³⁵ *The Leven Advertiser*, Tuesday, 3 February 1931.

¹³⁶ SRO WRH CB3/201: Copy of Writ, Sheriffdom of Fife and Kinross, 26 March 1932.

On 1 April 1932 the company agreed to commence the work without delay and to provide a suitable w.c. for each house. They proposed to do one block at a time and to find accommodation for the tenants elsewhere during the alteration.¹³⁷ The Town Council accepted the proposal but laid down conditions of time which were accepted by the company, but only if they could renovate one block at a time. On 31 March the Fife Coal Company contacted the Wemyss Coal Company to offer to sell them the houses in Leven. The offer was declined a day later.¹³⁸

In late April the work on the Leven houses commenced, but the architect was requested to note that the company was not pressing for speed in carrying through the operation. The point was, according to Carlow to have been seen to start at once.¹³⁹ By the end of 1932 the Town Council expressed dissatisfaction at the pace of the work, while the company continued to claim that they were making all progress possible. Throughout 1933 the Fife Coal Company continued to excuse their rate of work by claiming that they could only renovate 4 houses at a time due to the scarcity of houses in the locality. Indeed the company claimed they could do no more unless the Town Council undertook to house more of the tenants. The Council however had a long waiting list for its houses and could not place 16 houses at the disposal of the company.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile several of the tenants refused

¹³⁷ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 1 April 1932 from Charles Augustus Carlow to W. Wigston, Burgh Engineer.

¹³⁸ SRO WRH CB3/201: Telegram from the Wemyss Coal Company, east Wemyss to Charles Augustus Carlow.

¹³⁹SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 23 April 1932 from Charles Augustus Carlow to D.W. Robertson.

¹⁴⁰SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 27 January 1934 from Geo. McIntosh,

to return to the renovated houses because of the rent increases while others applied to the Council for houses on the grounds that they were living in overcrowded conditions at Carlow Place, Leven. When notified of this by the Council the company warned the occupiers that sub-letting was not permitted and that prosecutions would follow if rooms in houses were sub-let. The company was concerned that they would be criticised for permitting overcrowding while they were allegedly doing everything in their power to improve the tenants living conditions. In March 1934 the Town Council gave the company a further month to complete the project. By then the alterations to 28 houses at Carlow Place had been completed.

The company architect did not take the threat of court action seriously and suggested that the company take a defiant stance. At that stage he wanted the Council to reconsider the plans for Aitken Place. The company secretary's concern was that the managing director had promised the Council that action would be taken. The Council, anxious to see the work completed eventually agreed to the new proposals for the sanitary alterations to Aitken Place. This decision again delayed the process as new tenders had to be solicited for the revised work. By August 1934 the work had once again stopped but at that stage the company claimed to have renovated 68 houses in all.¹⁴¹ On 5 September 1934 the tenants of these houses were given two weeks notice of a rise in rent and rates of 10d. per week; this was considerably less than the 3s. a week originally anticipated and is likely to have been the level of increase the market would tolerate.

In February 1935 the Council once again pressed for completion of the

Town Clerk, to W. Walker.

¹⁴¹ SRO WRH CB3/201: Letter dated 23 Aug. 1934 from D.W. Robertson to W. Walker.

project. Mr. Reid of the Fife Coal Company Ltd. agreed to look into the matter. In October the company was again under attack from the Council, this time for the poor quality of the workmanship in the alterations to the houses. It was revealed that rhones had not been put on the outbuildings at Carlow Place, with the result that during heavy rain the surrounding ground became a quagmire. It had been reported at a Council meeting that the pools of water in Carlow Place were large enough to drown a child. The company's response was that the improvement of roads and drying greens formed part of the reconstruction scheme which they were due to carry out the next year. In the meantime they took steps to clear the pools of water.

10. 7. Conclusion

This chapter has explained how housing became embroiled in the conflict between the Miners' Federation and the Mine-owners' Association over the management of the coal-mining industry. The Miners' Federation cleverly presented poor quality housing as an pointer to mis-management by private enterprise. This was refuted by the coal-owners who attempted to demonstrate that (i) poor living conditions were often the fault of the occupants of company housing; (ii) the type of house provided was that demanded by the miners and that when better accommodation was available colliers refused to pay more rent for it; and (iii) Scottish coal-owners invested in high quality accommodation and even spent more than local authorities in the post-war years. Table 10.1. shows the number of houses built by Fife coal companies and private enterprise between the First World War and the Royal Commission of 1925, and clearly demonstrates the dependence of the companies upon government subsidies for house building during these years. Table 10.2. demonstrates the greater extent of

the building undertaken by Fife local authorities during the same years.

The view taken here is that the houses coal-companies erected after the First World War were built for political reasons, i.e. to defend the private ownership and management of the industry and to demonstrate the extent of their commitment to their workforce. No longer were coal-companies concerned about the welfare of their employees or about maintaining a workforce. With ample workers in need of employment Scottish coal-owners had a guaranteed supply of labour. That these workers were also willing to live in overcrowded conditions removed a further necessity for the companies to provide accommodation.

The evidence given in this chapter also highlights another concern of the coal-companies; in the inter-war years they did everything in their power to avoid investing company cash in workers' welfare. Despite the fact that coal companies made profits from housing, they were extremely reluctant to invest in maintenance and repair. The case of the renovation of the housing at Leven shows the lengths the Fife Coal Company went to to spread the cost of the sanitary additions over seven years. In doing so they cunningly manipulated the tenants of the houses and stalled the Town Council by repeatedly promising action while then suggesting reconsideration of the plans. All of this was despite the fact that Mr Charles Carlow's was said to have held strong views on the welfare of his workers, and that one of the primary clauses in his creed was that a man who was well contented and well-housed gave of his best in his daily work.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Muir, A.,(1958) *The Fife Coal Company Limited. A Short History*. Fife Coal Co. Leven. pps. 82-83.

With the pit-head baths the company again demonstrated its anxiety not be landed with commitments for future spending. Their problem with all of this was not that the miners expected investment from them, but that the government did. The Miners' Federation were clear about their desire for the State to take full responsibility for housing and welfare as they were determined to break the power and influence of coal companies in mining communities. The government on the other hand while being pressed into re-organisation of the industry, remained convinced of coal companies' obligation towards miners and responsibility for their welfare.

Table 10 .1. Houses Built by Colliery Companies and Private Enterprise.

	1919 Act	1923 Act	With State Assistance	Without State Assistance
Dunfermline District	27	380	367	0
Kirkcaldy District	70	539	479	62
Buckhaven Burgh	8	82	46	0
Cowdenbeath Burgh	0	85	82	0
Dysart Burgh	1	14	0	3
Leven Burgh	3	0	2	0
Lochgelly Burgh	15	19	0	0
Markinch Burgh	0	0	0	0

Source: Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1925.

Table 10. 2. Houses Built by Local Authorities in Mining Areas of Fife under State Assisted Schemes.

	Estimated Shortage	-Houses Completed-			Under Construction
		1919	1923	1924	1925
Dunfermline District	757	158	0	0	0
Kirkcaldy District	598	244	0	0	70
Buckhaven Burgh	400	250	100	0	122
Cowdenbeath Burgh	300	116	0	0	52
Dysart Burgh	50	10	0	0	12
Leven Burgh	100	100	44	0	56
Lochgelly Burgh	325	150	0	0	16
Markinch Burgh	50	24	0	0	0

Source: Royal Commission on the Coal Industry 1925.

Conclusion

This thesis is an attempt to account for the provision of miners' houses in Fife and to explain why Fife coal companies gradually stopped building workers' houses in the inter-war period. In researching the economic, political and social developments that effected coal company housing provision in Fife between 1870 and 1930, coal company records, in particular those of the Wemyss Coal Company and the Fife Coal Company Ltd. were examined. Private papers were also investigated. Government papers, including Local Government Board records, the report of the 1917 Royal Commission on Housing and the reports of the 1919 and 1925 Royal Commissions on the Coal Industry were studied as was housing legislation for the period.

The examination of the economics of the coal industry, of housing provision and of the political history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented in this thesis, suggests an economic explanation for the decline in coal company housing. Fife coal companies had to operate within the confines of national and international competition and increasing government intervention in the housing market and the coal industry. They also had to accommodate the unionisation of the mining workforce. Chapters 1 and 2 explained how coal-owners originally provided houses for their workers as a matter of economic necessity. In the absence of alternative agencies of provision they built houses to attract and maintain a productive workforce. They were concerned with output and profit, and therefore with sustaining and reproducing the mining workforce. Hence they were willing to invest in employees' welfare, including the provision of houses. The advantages to the coal-owners of direct provision of houses were that the houses attracted colliers and their families which guaranteed a labour supply; a stable

resident workforce ensured the reproduction of labour and therefore continued coal output. In return, coal-miners exchanged their labour power for wages and the welfare amenities provided by their employers. The advantages to the miners were that they had jobs and they had homes; these advantages offset any disadvantages arising from tied housing.

As the nineteenth century progressed Fife coal companies were placed under increasing pressure to withdraw from direct housing provision. It became increasingly difficult to gain overseas markets and as a result coal companies looked to cost reduction to maintain profitability. Thus they began to look at the return on all of their investments. Return for investment in workers' housing was below the market level. While this could be sustained when the industry was in profit and when the workforce was disciplined, it became difficult for the coal-owners to tolerate in the face of increasing economic pressure.

In dealing with the low return for housing investment, Fife coal-owners had two options. They could increase rent to the market level or they could withdraw from housing provision by gradually reducing investment in the maintenance and replacement of housing stock. As outlined in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, both options were resorted to in Fife. The first option was introduced in the post World War I years with the provision of new housing, the rent for which was charged at the market level. The response from the mining communities was either to refuse to rent the houses, or to pay the higher rent but to take in lodgers. The second option was also resorted to. Fife coal companies became increasingly reluctant to invest company funds in the renovation of old housing stock, with the result that housing quality deteriorated.

Practical difficulties associated with building, managing, maintaining and replacing company houses also influenced coal company withdrawal from the housing market. Complications of the Scottish system of local government, in particular the problems of jurisdiction and responsibility in mining districts, and the legal ramifications of mineral leases played their part (see Chapters 3 and 4). Changes in coal company policy towards the provision of workers' housing can be traced in mineral leases between coal companies and the owners of the land and minerals. Indeed, as suggested in Chapter 4, it was often beneficial to coal companies to let the stock deteriorate to the extent that the houses would be closed by the local authority; this removed coal company responsibility for their condition. Political events, in particular the intervention of the government in the housing market in the decades following 1870, also played a significant role in determining coal company policy towards workers' houses (see Chapter 3). Housing construction and design were regulated by the government through the enactment of national housing, health, police and sanitation acts and through the imposition of local bye-laws by local authorities. Intervention in working class housing culminated in the Housing Acts of 1919 and 1923 whereby local authorities were given power to build new dwellings and to subsidise private enterprise in housing construction.

Nevertheless, the government was a reluctant participant and avoided, as long as possible, interference in the private management of the coal-mining industry. In Chapters 8 and 9 it was shown that the government was inclined to favour the rights of coal-owners over those of colliers and upheld the interests of private enterprise until industrial unrest, during and after World War I, forced it to grant concessions to the mining community. While the government encouraged coal-owners to continue investment in workers' houses, their deteriorating condition and inadequate supply ultimately meant that the government had little choice but to take direct

responsibility for housing provision. In the years leading up to the First World War it became increasingly clear that Scottish coal-owners were reluctant to invest company funds in housing. While they continued to build new houses during and after the war, they were never erected on the scale required to adequately provide homes for the workforce. As shown in Chapter 9, the publication in 1917 of the report of the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland obliged the government to take responsibility for housing the working class. All of the welfare initiatives for miners in post-World War I Scotland, including houses, pit-head baths and miners' institutes, were introduced by the government as results of the 1917 Royal Commission on Housing and the 1919 and 1925 Coal Industry Commissions. These initiatives were funded largely through government subsidies. Coal companies reluctantly paid a share.

The thesis has shown therefore that in the period between 1870 and 1930 investment in company housing became a costly business. Fife coal-owners were under pressure from the government, land owners, local authorities and from their own shareholders. Indeed as the coal industry's prosperity declined the necessity to build housing to attract workers was removed. In times of recession there were plenty of miners available to work in the mines and only too willing to forego company housing. The value of company housing was at its peak when the industry required workers and the companies needed to ensure the ready supply of labour.

While at one level economic and political pressure and practical difficulties associated with miners' housing provide satisfactory explanations for the decline in coal company housing in Fife, there nevertheless appears to have been more than economic expediency involved in housing provision for miners. For example, the high quality of the houses provided for miners at East Wemyss, Coaltown of Wemyss and Methilhill suggests that the

Wemyss Coal Company was not merely interested in building homes for colliers. Furthermore, the Wemyss Coal Company provided the local community with a hospital, homes for retired miners, a bowling green, church and school of needlecraft. This company was also the first in Fife to contribute to pit-head baths. Examination of Fife coal company records revealed that it was common practice to cater for the welfare needs of employees, including the granting of concessions to the poor and needy in mining communities. These strong indications that coal company interest in their employees spread beyond the coalmines prompted investigation of social relations in Fife mining communities during the 1870-1930 period. The coincidence of the decline in coal company housing provision with the rise in strength and political influence of the trade union movement among miners further suggested a link between housing and labour relations. The fact too that so many Fife miners and their families lived in company houses indicated the importance of housing to the coal-owner/collier relationship.

The study of the social history of mining in Scotland suggests that as well as being motivated by economic concerns, coal company housing provision in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century was influenced by traditions carried forward from pre-industrial times when coal was first extracted on a large scale. The provision of miners' housing and welfare became part of the employment agreement between colliers and "coal masters". This placed the colliers in a dependent position and thereby increased coal company influence over their lives. The dependence of Fife miners upon their "coal masters" for housing and welfare and the extent of coal-owner provision across the spectrum of welfare amenities, prompted consideration of paternalism and deference (see Chapter 5) and their operation in Fife mining communities (see Chapters 6 and 7). The treatment concentrated mainly on housing provision

as one manifestation of paternalism, but also considered recreational and educational provision, care of the sick, elderly and vulnerable in mining communities. It would appear from the evidence given that paternalism was embraced for generations by older, established, land-owning coal companies, such as Wemyss and Fordell, and that coal companies founded in the late-nineteenth century, like the Fife and Lochgelly coal companies, adopted paternalism as it was a successful means of promoting good social relations.

Deference was a consequence of paternalism; encouraged by the patronage of coal employers. Long established family firms were in a particularly strong position to convert dependence into deference through their influence over, and social ties with, the local workforce. The exercise of traditional authority therefore encouraged deference. Chapters 5-7 attempted to consider the extent to which this was true for Fife and to investigate whether coal-owners' influence over the lives of their workers, and the dependence encouraged through housing provision, were translated into a subtle form of control. It was suggested that deference served to increase coal company influence, and thereby power, by reinforcing paternalism. The paternalism/deference combination could therefore be seen as a form of control, reinforcing the control exercised through the economic relations identified earlier. Evidence on the allocation of houses, concessions in terms of rent payment and free coal or reductions in rent and charges for domestic coal, was presented in support of the operation of paternalism and deference in Fife.

The examination of these issues was taken a stage further in consideration of the role of community identity in fostering deference through socialisation of behaviour. It was suggested that the pre-industrial experience of the Fife coal-mining industry fostered local loyalty and a

strong sense of community identity, which encouraged conformity and thereby reinforced deference.

While this may have been true, pre-industrial work practices were nevertheless the antithesis of emerging capitalism. The economic and political pressures upon the coal-mining industry that eventually resulted in the withdrawal of coal companies from the housing market also influenced labour relations. The necessity to remain viable in a competitive environment undermined traditional work practices in Fife. It is postulated that deference and paternalism in Fife succumbed to economic pressure and that the gradual withdrawal of welfare provision and concessions led to poor quality housing condition which exacerbated conflict between miners and coal companies over wages and working conditions. Mining communities, when faced with a decline in living conditions and standards, adopted Labour politics and the trade union movement in self defence. Although it took half a century for the miners' union to gain a foothold in Fife, once established the union's influence spread rapidly. In time, the trade union drew its strength from the communal solidarity which had once bolstered deference. The conflict which arose between residual elements of pre-industrial relations and new capital relations therefore caused a tension in the miner/coal-owner relationship which was not resolved until the government took responsibility for working class housing and miners were no longer dependent upon coal companies for their homes and welfare. This tension reflected the wider political, economic and social pressures mentioned above which impinged upon the Fife coal-mining industry between 1870 and 1930.

While the evidence unearthed in researching this thesis has hinted that tied housing fostered paternalism and deference and influenced social and labour relations, the links need to be more firmly established. This is not to

say that paternalism and deference did not operate in Fife during the period, but rather that more robust evidence than that provided is required to tease out the exact impact of paternalism and deference and the links with economic issues. For example, the extent to which Fife colliers were deferential towards their employers needs further investigation. One means of taking the paternalism and deference "model" forward would be to conduct further research on labour relations in Fife. This could be done through examination of trade union evidence; particularly trade union journals, trade papers, the MacArthur/Proudfoot collection in Methil Library, the autobiography of Abe Moffat and examination of local newspapers. The evidence presented on the allocation of free housing and coal is also not in itself sufficient to justify the suggestion that paternalism and deference were translated into power and thereby social control. Further evidence on the exercise of power in Fife mining communities is required. Again this evidence may lie in trade union records. The level of strike activity and support for independent Labour politics could also be investigated. Examination of such evidence might clearly demonstrate that industrial and political struggle over the period influenced the housing question.

Housing was only one of many welfare provisions. In addition to those mentioned above, there are other avenues of research associated with coal company housing provision in Fife that await the attention of researchers. Examination of village and community life through local newspapers for the period 1870-1930 and through oral sources would be useful in the further investigation of social relations. Work also remains to be done on household structure and the workplace; the role of women in the struggle for better housing and living conditions; the provision of health care and education; on contrasts between the managerial styles of long established and relatively modern coal foundations; and finally on the financial records

of coal companies. These issues have been touched on in the thesis and are worthy of further examination.

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