



Gibbs, E. and Phillips, J. (2019) Remembering Auchengeich: the largest fatal accident in Scottish coal in the nationalised era. *Scottish Labour History*, 54, pp. 47-57.

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/210374/>

Deposited on: 19 February 2020

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Remembering Auchengeich: the largest fatal accident in Scottish coal in the nationalised era

Ewan Gibbs and Jim Phillips

The largest fatal accident in the post-Second World War Scottish coal industry took place on 18 September 1959, when 47 men were killed at Auchengeich Colliery in Moodiesburn, North Lanarkshire. On the sixtieth anniversary, we pay tribute to the Auchengeich miners, who died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning arising from a large underground fire. This short note analyses the catastrophe within the longer history of underground dangers in the mining industry in Scotland. The nationalisation of coal mining in 1947 and stronger union voice in workplaces made mining much safer. Coal industry data summarised in this note shows that the rate of death underground roughly halved from the 1930s to the 1950s, but the calamitous losses at Auchengeich, nevertheless, demonstrated that mining remained a perilous occupation for the mass of workers engaged in underground work. Significant shortcomings in National Coal Board (NCB) management contributed directly to the loss of life at the colliery. A public inquiry on the Auchengeich disaster provided National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA) officials with an opportunity to push for renewed vigilance on underground safety, and a further drop in the death rate followed. There is a well-tended and dignified memorial garden to the disaster in Moodiesburn, established initially during the great strike in defence of communities, collieries and jobs in 1984-85. This highlights important linkages between coal industry commemoration, working-class organisation and deindustrialisation.

Nationalisation and Improved Safety

In a recent study of South Wales, Selway contrasted the political attention paid to occasional major disasters with the absence of interest in frequently-recurring smaller accidents which, because of their routine character, contributed to a much larger number of injuries and deaths.¹ This was the pattern in Scotland before nationalisation: more miners were killed overall in smaller incidents than larger incidents. Two structural factors aggravated underground danger before 1947: a wave of mechanisation in the 1920s, which contributed to greater 'noise' and distraction in collieries; and the outcome of the 1921 and 1926 mining lockouts, with cost-controlling employers pushing union

¹ David Selway, 'Death Underground: Mining Accidents and Memory in South Wales, 1913-74', *Labour History Review*, 81.3 (2016), 187-209.

activists out of the industry.² The greater incidence of death underground in Scotland than in England and Wales was reported by the Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines in 1938. In Scotland, the average annual rate of fatality between 1927 and 1931 was 0.53 every 100,000 man-shifts while across Britain it was 0.43 per 100,000 man-shifts. Some convergence in the annual death rates between Scotland and the rest of Britain followed: the average from 1932 to 1936 was 0.47 per 100,000 man-shifts in Scotland and 0.44 in the whole of Britain.³

Notable improvement followed the Second World War and nationalisation, with enhanced industry and workplace union voice influencing a sustained drop in fatal accidents. The NCB was committed to protecting 'the health and safety of those they employ'.⁴ The new institutional arrangements included joint employer-union workplace consultative committees. These countered the ideology of managerial prerogative that prevailed in the pre-nationalised coal sector and tended to characterise practices elsewhere in British industry during the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ Positive improvements followed. From 1947 to 1951, the annual average rate of death in Scottish mines was 0.26 per 100,000 man-shifts and from 1952 to 1956 it was 0.24. The Auchengeich disaster contributed to a short-run spike in post-1947 deaths, the annual average rate of fatality from 1957 to 1961 rising to 0.31 per 100,000 man-shifts, although this was still well below the 1927 to 1931 rate. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the trend identified by Selway, of deaths from small fatal accidents outweighing those from large accidents, no longer applied in Scotland. In the five-year period from 1962 to 1966, when there were no major disasters in Scotland, the rate of death fell even further, to 0.23 per 100,000 man-shifts.⁶ Explosions of fire damp and coal dust along with fire and roof falls were the main causes of serious accidents identified by the Royal Commission in 1938. Although gas, coal dust and fire remained hazards throughout the 1950s, and four men were killed by an ignition of firedamp at Auchengeich's North Lanarkshire neighbour, the 'notoriously gassy' Cardowan, in July 1960,⁷ accidents caused by these elements were progressively eliminated. There

² Alan Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874-1939. Volume One: Work, Industry and Community; and Volume Two: Trade Unions and Politics* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000) Campbell, *Scottish Miners. Volume One*, pp. 60, 117, 139-40.

³ *Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines. Report*, Cmd. 5890 (HMSO: London, 1938), Table 13.

⁴ National Coal Board, *Report and Accounts for 1950*, HC 188 (HMSO: London, 1951), para. 43.

⁵ Alan Fox, *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations. Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, Research Papers, 3* (HMSO: London, 1966).

⁶ National Coal Board, *Report and Accounts* (House of Commons, various years, 1950-1966); the long-run data is analysed in Jim Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 85-94.

⁷ *Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines. Report*, Cmd. 5890 (HMSO: London, 1938), p. 4.

was only one fatal fire in Scottish collieries after the 1959 Auchengeich disaster, at Michael in East Wemyss, East Fife, in September 1967.⁸

To summarise the broad trend, the rate of death in Scottish mining under private ownership from 1927 to 1931 was double that from 1962 to 1966 under public ownership; and as everyday safety improved, large-scale disasters had a much greater impact on overall rates of fatality. Auchengeich was preceded by three other major accidents in the nationalised era. At Knockshinnoch near New Cumnock in Ayrshire, thirteen miners were killed by an inrush of peat and moss from the surface in September 1950.⁹ At Kames, in the Ayrshire village of Muirkirk, seventeen died after an explosion of gas in November 1957. Less than a month later another nine were killed at Lindsay in Keltie, Central Fife, also following an explosion of gas. In both 1957 disasters, the gas was ignited by a smoker's match. Smoking was permitted at Kames but not at Lindsay, where the smoker had smuggled cigarettes and matches into the mine. He paused to light up while cutting coal and was killed. His actions were not those of an isolated individual. The surrounding roadways were littered with cigarettes and matches, which were also retrieved by police officers from the clothing of others killed. Sir Harold Roberts, Chief Inspector of Mines, who chaired inquiries into the Kames and Lindsay accidents, recommended that smoking be prohibited across the industry, revoking the distinction between non-gassy and gassy or safety lamp pits which the NCB had inherited from private ownership.¹⁰

Auchengeich, September 1959

There were 840 miners employed at Auchengeich in 1959, 340 of them in No. 2 pit, where the disaster took place. A fire developed underground early in the morning of 18 September, just as 140 men were making their way towards the face at the start of the day shift. The fire was caused by an over-heated belt on a giant fan in the return airway, 1,710 yards from the pit bottom. Like Cardowan and other pits nearby, Auchengeich was gassy, and the fan was dispersing fumes down the airway. The belt slipped from the fan, heated up, smouldered and then burned. The fire moved from the belt to the fan itself, where oil ignited, intensifying the flames which leapt to wooden props and other materials in the return airway. Two locomotives at this point were bringing miners towards the fire.

⁸ Jim Phillips, '50 Years On: Remembering Michael Colliery', *Scottish Labour History*, 52 (2017), pp. 22-30.

⁹ *Accident at Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery, Ayrshire, 7 September 1950*, by Sir Andrew Bryan, H. M. Chief Inspector of Mines, Cmd. 8180 (HMSO: London, 1951), pp. 12-20.

¹⁰ Ministry of Power, *Explosion at Kames Colliery, Ayrshire, 19 November 1957, Report by Sir Harold Roberts*, Cmnd. 467 (HMSO: London, 1958); Ministry of Power, *Explosion at Lindsay Colliery, Fifeshire, 14 December 1957*, by Sir Harold Roberts, Cmnd. 485 (HMSO: London, 1958).

The first train, with forty on board, came up the return airway, and halted at the terminus beside the fan. The men escaped through safety doors to the inward airway and retreated on foot to the pit shaft. The second train, carrying 48 men, arrived afterwards. The fire had become more intense and the atmosphere more toxic in the short time since the first train's passengers had escaped. Those on the second train signalled to the engine box at the bottom of the pit shaft for help. The train was drawn back but those on board were overcome by carbon monoxide poisoning. All but one died.¹¹

The terrible facts of the case were established at a subsequent public inquiry, held in Glasgow, where Abe Moffat, NUMSA President, squeezed important and damaging revelations from NCB managers.¹² Intermittent problems with the fan over the three months preceding the fire had not been fixed. The belt in use on the morning of 18 September was characterised by T. A. Rogers, the new Chief Inspector of Mines and Quarries, as of inadequate strength. Moffat accused the colliery's manager and under-manager of 'a complete lack of responsibility' in flouting safety regulations and not taking essential precautions.¹³ These officials were subsequently prosecuted. A charge of failing to ensure that the fan belt was in good condition was found not proven. But on two other charges, the manager and under-manager were found guilty: failing to appoint persons to oversee the fan during the night shift and failing to secure adequate supply of water to the place where the fire occurred. They were admonished on the first charge and on the second each fined £100.¹⁴

The disaster demonstrated that mining remained a highly dangerous occupation, despite the broader improvements secured by nationalisation and stronger union advocacy. The trend to a safer industry based on public ownership and joint industrial regulation was, nevertheless, evident even in the painful aftermath of 18 September. James Cowan, Production Director for the Scotland West-Central Area, invited Abe Moffat to inspect the colliery and provided him with detailed underground plans.¹⁵ Ronald Parker, the NCB Scottish Division's Chairman, wrote to each of the bereaved families, on Sunday 20 September, just two days after the deaths. Parker and senior NCB managers accompanied union officials to the funerals that followed, at St. Barbara's Chapel in Muirhead,

¹¹ Ministry of Power, *Underground Fire at Auchengeich Colliery, Lanarkshire, 18 September 1959*, by T. A. Rogers, H. M. Chief Inspector of Mines and Quarries, Cmnd. 1022 (HMSO: London, 1960), Plan No. 1, Auchengeich Colliery No. 2 Pit, and pp. 2-3, 21-6.

¹² National Records of Scotland (NRS), CB 207/13/7, Legal Adviser to Chairman, NCB Scottish Division, 20 January 1960.

¹³ 'Q. C. says an unexplained error caused pit disaster. N. C. B. "not responsible" for faulty belt', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 January 1960.

¹⁴ NRS, CB 207/13/7, NCB Scottish Division, Production Department, Auchengeich Colliery – Prosecution of Manager and Under-Manager, 10 January 1961.

¹⁵ NRS, CB 207/39/3/2, James Cowan to Abe Moffat, 17 December 1959.

Chryston Parish Church, and St. Mary's Church in Kirkintilloch.¹⁶ Twenty-three of the victims had lived in these and adjacent settlements, within two miles of the colliery. Eighteen others had been travelling to work from more distant addresses, transferred to Auchengeich as other collieries closed earlier in the 1950s. Bellshill, Blantyre, High Blantyre, Bothwellhaugh, Hamilton and Uddingston, along with Coatbridge and Bargeddie, all lost men at Auchengeich.¹⁷

Auchengeich re-opened in 1960 and continued producing coal until its closure in 1965.¹⁸ A new underground danger was emerging. The greater application of power-loading in the early 1960s contributed to an upward rise in reportable injury rates. Fatal accidents were also caused by this new wave of mechanisation, most notably a serious roof fall which killed five miners at Seafield Colliery in East Fife, in May 1973.¹⁹ The average annual rate of death overall was, nevertheless, still falling, to 0.21 per 100,000 man-shifts from 1966 to 1973.²⁰ The hazards of mining were undeniably moderated by union activism. Where employers had attacked workplace unionism in the 1920s and 1930s, the risks to workers of death, serious injury and illness had increased. The reverse was true in the 1950s and 1960s, when public ownership and union voice cut the rate of fatality in half.

Memorialisation at Auchengeich

In Scotland, there are at least 160 Scottish memorials to mining, miners and the coal industry. These have been identified by Jim Henry, a volunteer at the National Mining Museum Scotland (NMMS), whose impressive dossier includes photographs of most of the memorials documented. Henry's research supports the conclusion that mining became less hazardous after nationalisation. Forty-five memorials directly commemorate fatal accidents. Thirty-five relate to fatal accidents that occurred before nationalisation, twenty-one of these prior to the First World War and another fourteen preceding 1946. Just ten memorialise post-nationalisation disasters. These include a cairn at Knockshinnoch by New Cumnock, a replica of the Michael head-frame in East Wemyss, and the Auchengeich memorial garden in Moodiesburn.²¹

¹⁶ NRS, CB 207/13/7, Notes of Informal Meetings, NCB Scottish Division Board, 19 September 1959 and 21 September 1959; P. O. Osbourne, Secretary, NCB Scotland Central West Area, to K. G. Smith, Secretary, NCB Scottish Division, 24 September 1959; and Note on Funeral Arrangements, Auchengeich, 25 September 1959.

¹⁷ NRS, CB 207/39/3/2, Assistant Area Safety Engineer to J. R. Cowan, Production Manager, NCB Scotland Central West Area, List of Auchengeich Fatal Casualties, 30 September 1959; Jim Phillips calculations.

¹⁸ NRS, CB 207/24/1, Minute of Meeting, Proposed Closure of Auchengeich Colliery, 25 February 1965.

¹⁹ Department of Trade and Industry, *Extensive Fall of Roof at Seafield Colliery Fife, 10 May 1973, Report by J. W. Calder, Chief Inspector of Mines and Quarries*, Cmnd. 5485 (HMSO: London, 1973).

²⁰ Phillips, *Scottish Coal Miners*, p. 85.

²¹ National Mining Museum Scotland, Newtongrange, 'Mining Memorials in Scotland'.

The Auchengeich garden is located beside the Miners' Club in Moodiesburn. Images can be viewed on the *Scottish Mining* website, an important independent resource maintained by volunteers, which also lists the miners killed.²² A winding wheel stands in the foreground of the garden, nearest the roadside. Towards the back a wall contains plaques listing the forty-seven who died in 1959, along with details of an earlier fatal explosion on 22 January 1931 that killed six men. A bronze cast statue of a miner by John McKenna forms the garden's centrepiece.²³ The contemplative mood is set by the statue's configuration. The miner's head is bowed, and he holds a pick-axe at rest, its blade settled on a bed of coal. The names of those killed in 1959 and 1931 are written on stones surrounding the statue, which was commissioned by Willie Doolan, Ian Lowe and Danny Taylor of the Auchengeich Miners' Welfare Society. Each September the memorial provides the focal point for an annual remembrance service, which Willie leads as chair of the Auchengeich Miners Memorial Committee. Willie comes from a Moodiesburn mining family and spoke about the disaster and the memorial in an interview conducted earlier this year by Ewan Gibbs to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the disaster and inform this research note. He vividly remembers the permanency of the disaster, which took place when he was four years old. Willie's father was part of the Mines Rescue team deployed to Auchengeich. Neighbours lost fathers, brothers and sons; future school mates grew up in bereaved families. Willie joined the NCB in the early 1970s, before becoming an NUM representative and safety inspector at Cardowan colliery.²⁴

Selway's analysis of coalfield memorialisation in South Wales shows that memorials to miners killed in accidents were generally established only after the communities affected had ceased to be reliant on the industry for employment. Politically, it was difficult for communities to acknowledge the present dangers of the industry while local men were still working underground.²⁵ In Scotland, it is more accurate to see coalfield memorialisation as having accompanied rather than followed the closure of mines. This took place within the longer and difficult 'half-life' of deindustrialisation, as communities once reliant on coal production and employment adjusted to their new economic situation.²⁶ Memorialisation of mining and miners' deaths were part of a collective repertoire of memory-making. This involved a determined defence of the positive social values and experiences of the past, and a willingness to reflect on the good times as well as the hard

²² www.scottishmining.co.uk/250.html; accessed 13 May 2019.

²³ A4A Art for Architecture & John McKenna Sculpture Ltd., <https://johnmckennasculpture.blogspot.com/>

²⁴ Cardowan Colliery (Accident), House of Commons, Debates, 27 January 1982, Sixth Series, Vol. 16, columns 889-91, *Hansard* <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/jan/27/cardowan-colliery-accident>, accessed 20 June 2019; Willie Doolan, Interview with Ewan Gibbs, The Pivot, Moodiesburn, 14 June 2019.

²⁵ Selway, 'Death Underground'.

²⁶ Tim Strangleman, 'Deindustrialisation and the Historical Sociological Imagination: making sense of work and industrial change', *Sociology*, 51 (2017), pp. 466-482; Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation. Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

times associated with industrial employment. The coal industry shaped communities that were disfigured by class conflict and gender inequalities but, nevertheless, attained substantial social cohesion in the context of the economic security that was won and defended by coal miners and their union and political representatives from the 1940s to the 1970s.²⁷

The Auchengeich memorial amply demonstrates these distinct political dimensions of coalfield memorialisation in Scotland. As late as 1982, the dangers of mining were very much part of life in Lanarkshire. A major explosion of gas at Cardowan's No.2 pit on the morning of 27 January left 25 men burned, with seven stretchered to hospital. All thankfully survived. Willie recalls being able to 'smell burning flesh' later that day when he visited the pit with H. M. Mines Inspectorate officials in his capacity as a colliery safety inspector.²⁸ This incident – another catastrophe narrowly avoided – shaped the founding of the Auchengeich memorial following the closure of Cardowan about eighteen months later, in August 1983. This was highly contentious. Members of the NCB's Scottish Area management made redundancy and transfer payment offers to the workforce before closure had been formalised. These measures undermined the place of union voice in the nationalised industry. The Board's tactics at Cardowan anticipated steps pursued across Britain during the 1984-85 strike, when the NCB communicated directly with striking miners – over the heads of their union representatives – to incentivise strike-breaking through large financial inducements.²⁹

During the strike, Cardowan's former miners organised their efforts through a union centre in Stepps, close to their former place of work. This was charged by the NUMSA with responsibility for distributing food parcels, fundraising and running soup kitchens as well as picketing.³⁰ Willie explained that as the strike developed, significant numbers of men were unable to take part in picketing, with several having been arrested and given prohibitive bail conditions. To combat isolation, 'the guys from this neck o the woods, they decided it was time there was a permanent memorial, public memorial within the community in honour of the men that had lost their lives.' Strikers had to 'beg, borrow and steal' material for the initiative. Willie explained that the winding wheel was gifted to the strikers by Cardowan colliery management through an 'unofficial agreement'.³¹ This development exemplified the complex inter-play of conflict and cooperation between miners and management in the nationalised industry. These factors were also evident in

²⁷ Shelley Condratto and Ewan Gibbs, 'After Industrial Citizenship: Adapting to Precarious Employment in the Lanarkshire Coalfield, Scotland, and Sudbury Hardrock Mining, Canada', *Labour/Le Travail*, 81 (Spring 2018), pp. 213-239.

²⁸ Willie Doolan, Interview, 2019.

²⁹ Ewan Gibbs, 'The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalization c.1947-1983', *Enterprise and Society*, 19 .1 (2018), pp. 124-152, with detail at pp.145-6.

³⁰ Pat Egan, Interview with Ewan Gibbs, Fife College, Glenrothes, 5 February 2014.

³¹ Willie Doolan, Interview, 2019.

relation to health and safety, notably in Moffat's diverse dealings with NCB officials. During an earlier interview which will inform Ewan Gibbs' forthcoming book, *Coal Country: the meaning and memory of deindustrialization in postwar Scotland* (to be published by the Institute for Historical Research in 2021) Willie recalled Cardowan colliery's manager, John Frame, as 'a good Christian' who had supported the workforce's opposition to closure in 1983 and suffered recriminations from his superiors as a result.³²

The annual public commemoration in Moodiesburn, established during the strike era, has become an embedded dimension of remembrance locally and across Scotland and Britain. Regular attenders from other former coalfield areas include representatives of the Durham Miners' Association. The garden site has grown over time, supported by private donations secured by the memorial committee, and by the East Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire local authorities. The core original feature, the Cardowan winding wheel, was later accompanied by free standing stones with the plaques bearing the dead miners' names. These were supported by contributions from miners at the Longannet colliery complex in West Fife and Clackmannan, where many Lanarkshire men travelled daily to work after the closure of Cardowan, including Willie Doolan, who became the NUM delegate at Castlebridge. Donations of stone came from the Auchengeich Miners' Welfare Society. The miner statue was added in 2009, on the fiftieth anniversary, carefully realised by McKenna in partnership with the Auchengeich committee. This ensured its authenticity, according to Willie, incorporating 'the style of design that was from Lanarkshire miners of that period, reflecting 1959,' including Glennie lamp and Oldham cap lamp and battery. Mournfully, Willie also mentioned the omission of a self-rescuer which was only issued universally as part of the standard kit after the Michael disaster in 1967. He reflected that this eventual success for trade unionism came after the preventable loss of a large numbers of lives to gas poisoning.³³

The statue was unveiled at the 2009 service by Alex Salmond. The involvement of the then First Minister of Scotland accentuated the political significance of memorialising both the 1959 Auchengeich disaster and the coal industry's national contribution to Scottish society. Salmond said he was 'honoured to pay tribute' to the miners killed in 1959, and emphasised Scotland's heavy debt of gratitude to all who had faced the 'risks and dangers' of coal extraction 'as part of their job every time they descended the pits'.³⁴ At the 2018 service, representatives of the Durham Miners'

³² Willie Doolan, Interview with Ewan Gibbs, The Pivot, Moodiesburn, 12 March 2014.

³³ Willie Doolan, Interview, 2019.

³⁴ 'Fifty years on-the pit tragedy that killed 47', *The Scotsman*, 20 September 2009 <https://www.scotsman.com/news-2-15012/fifty-years-on-the-pit-tragedy-that-killed-47-1-775760>, accessed 17th June 2019.

Association were in attendance with their union banner. A choir of school children sang, and there were speeches from local politicians, union officials and religious figures. Mick Hogg of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, a victimised miner in the Lothian coalfield during the 1984-85 strike, paid tribute to the miners who died in 1959. He emphasised the persistence of danger in the mining industry, arguing that only collective organisation had taken miners from feudal 'bondage' to the social partnership of public ownership.³⁵ A larger ceremony was held to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the disaster. Around five-hundred people gathered for a procession that was led by the Moodiesburn District Pipe Band. Miners' banners from across the Scottish coalfield as well as Yorkshire and Durham were joined by those of other trade unions including Unite and the RMT. Nicky Wilson, a former electrician at Cardowan colliery and the current NUM UK President, was among the speakers at the rally which followed. He emphasised the long struggle for health and safety improvements in the Scottish coal mining industry, singling out the NUMSA's ultimately successful struggle for a self-rescuer. During their contributions, Nicky and Willie Doolan both contrasted the 'price of coal' paid in human lives with the financial priorities which dictated the accelerated deindustrialisation during the 1980s and 1990s. A strong sense of intergenerational solidarity was communicated at the event. Local primary school children formed a choir whilst others were dressed as miners during the procession. Their involvement underlined both the communal traditions of coalfield communities but also underlined the enduring legacy of lost lives and the struggle for safer workplaces.³⁶

Conclusion

Selway's study of coalfield memorialisation in South Wales drew two conclusions. Firstly, memorials were established in post-industrial political-cultural situations, when communities could accept that mining was a dangerous occupation because few or none of their inhabitants were working underground. Secondly, memorials marked large-scale disasters, where in fact small-scale accidents contributed a greater overall share of fatalities. Experience in Scotland, as exemplified in the Auchengeich disaster and memorial, qualifies each of these conclusions. First, the Auchengeich memorial originated in the collective struggle against deindustrialisation in 1984-85. It preceded rather than followed the ending of mining as an occupation pursued by Lanarkshire workers, and was stimulated in part by the recent experience of near-disaster at Cardowan in 1982. Through constructing the memorial and founding the annual commemoration, the workforce and community

³⁵ Ewan Gibbs, observer's notes, 16 September 2018.

³⁶ Ewan Gibbs, observer's notes, 15 September 2019.

laid claim to local industrial history and mobilised it in their defence of continued colliery employment. The legacy of 1959 and continued presence of danger mandated a more just management of workplaces and economic change than that offered by the aggressive pursuits of financial targets and the removal of union voice from the industry. These efforts continue through labour movement involvement in the memorial service. Second, the manner and timing of the memorial's establishment reinforced the importance of working-class organisation in securing major advances in industrial safety in the coalfields after nationalisation. By the mid-1950s, such improvement meant that large-scale disasters greatly outweighed the impact of smaller-scale accidents on the overall death toll. The landscape of Moodiesburn is permanently marked by the Auchengeich memorial garden, and, as the disaster recedes from human memory, it is vital that the disaster continues to be publicly commemorated. Deep coal mining has ceased in Scotland, with no probable return, but health and safety in workplaces is still a major contention in our own century. The lives lost at Auchengeich and all other collieries are a powerful reminder that Scotland's contemporary economy and society were built at an incalculable human cost. We recall with humility the lives of those who were killed while employed in the coal industry in Scotland and acknowledge the centrality of the collective political and union effort still needed to achieve economic security, stable communities and safe workplaces.