

# **Snippits of Early Coalmining at Auchanbeg**

**Dec. 3 2025 at the  
Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn**

**By D. Bruce McCowan, P. Eng.**

*The James McCowan Memorial*

*Social History Initiative*

**[www.mccowan.org/publicat.htm](http://www.mccowan.org/publicat.htm)**

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## Some Recent Presentations

- ***Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking***: OSSTF District 12 Professional Development, 2012
- ***The Completely Acquainted Engineer***: Professional Engineers Ontario Engineering Education Outreach Conference (PEO EEOC), 2012
- ***Agricultural Change in Cumnock, 1600-1830***: Dumfries House, Ayr, 2013
- Discussion Panellist, ***Shaping Our Future With Math and Physics***: PEO EEOC, 2015
- ***The Wood You Have Delivered -- The Scots of Scarborough and the Forest***: The Scarborough Exhibition of the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, 2016
- ***Thinking Like Telford***: PEO EEOC, 2016
- ***Thinking Like Murdoch***: PEO EEOC, 2017
- ***Stockbriggs Curling Pond: Challenging a Curling History Myth***: LPHA, 2025

# **Alternate Title**

***Photography:  
One of Several Valuable Tools  
in the Story-Telling and  
Lesson-Teaching***

# What's the Story / Lesson Here?

- Photos of physical remains of something at some point in time (1970s-80s in this Auchanbeg case) mean rather little without useful context
- The real story here should relate to the evolving values that we hold as a civilization, such as:
  - Freedom and individuality
  - Equity, inclusion and sharing
  - Personal development and leadership
  - Determination and honest toil
  - Sovereignty, sense of security and control of destiny
  - Competition, risk-taking and reward
  - Frugality and material wealth
  - Literacy
  - Sustainable progress and clear perspective on the important fundamentals of civilization

# Modelling Our Values: Artifacts / Furniture Remains



The old blanket box (possibly late 18<sup>th</sup> c), once loaded with the family library of books for the trip across the Atlantic, tells the story of a determined quest for lifelong learning and of a risky journey to a new life in a new land.



# Modelling Our Values: 2



The primitive framed mirror reminds us to reflect on our actions and how we can perform better next time.

The washstand and basin model our struggle to design, build and maintain public health infrastructure.



# Modelling Our Values: 3



The sailing ship was possibly painted by an artistic daughter during the 7-week ocean crossing in 1833, the fire-screen represents the importance of safety and risk-awareness in the home.

These 4 artifacts were inherited by George McCowan (1922-2021), gr-gr grandson of James McCowan and Margaret Porteous.

The fire-screen, “looking glass” and blanket box were possibly in use at Auchanbeg, Lesmahagow, c 1830.

# **East Auchanbeg ca 1980:**

## **Runrig; Tree Plantation; Hedgerows; Holes in the Ground; and Rocks on the Ground**

- How do photos of these physical remains map onto the evolution of values that we hold as a society?
  - Runrig: Struggle to grow food on marginal ground
  - Beech Tree Plantation: Pride of home and place of business in the spirit of improvement
  - Subsidence: Falling Overburden – Dangerous worksite -- but you need to feed your family
  - Rocks: A primitive home shared with your cattle



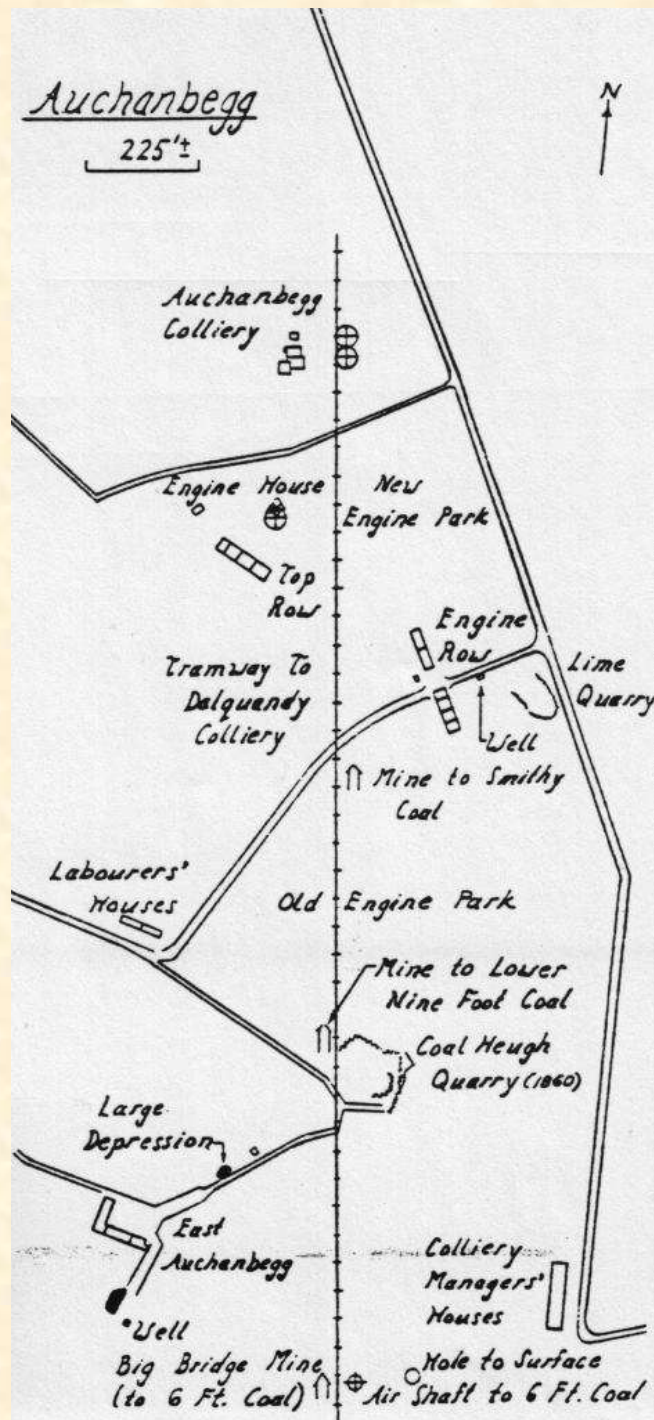
# **Context:**

## **Other Tools in the Lesson-Teaching**

- To help map “Remains Photos” onto the evolution of our values, other “snapshots” are included here:
  - Bits of oral history
  - Archival documents, maps and surveys
  - Bits of analysis and interpretation

# Placenames Confusion

- East Auchanbeg was also known as South Auchanbeg and it appears that it was a somewhat secondary 18<sup>th</sup> century holding to “West Auchanbeg” aka “North Auchanbeg”
- Auchanbeg is also spelled Auchinbeg or Auchenbeg (sometimes ‘gg’)
- Some maps, starting with Forrest (1813-16), seem to show East Auchanbeg as “Clatteringhall” (and also possibly “Brighigh” in 18<sup>th</sup> c)
- Stockbriggs is sometimes called Stockbridge
- Shoulderrigg was also known as Shoddrig, Shuterrig and Southrig



# Simplified Sketch, Drawn c 1983

-A composite of several estate plans and maps: James Whiteford (1802), William Forrest (1813), James Knox (1835), Ordnance Survey as marked up by the estate owner (1860), Geological Survey (1912), National Coal Board plans of underground workings (1923).

-Coalburn is about mile to the east

-Porterhall is just to the north, Abbey Green 3 miles to north

-Clay for Stockbriggs curling pond (c 1817) was probably extracted by McCowan at the outcrop of the Lower 9 Foot Coal

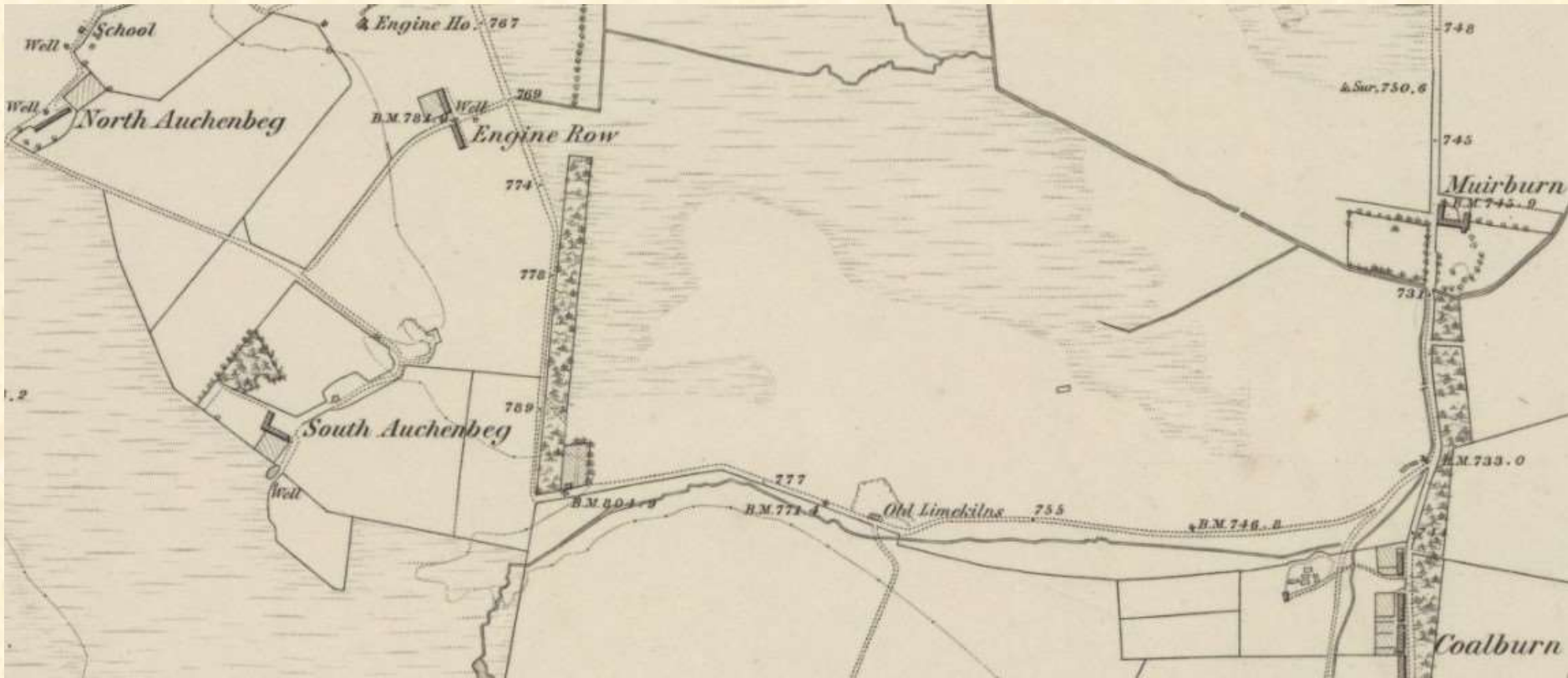
# The Monks and the Coal Outcrops

- Excavations in 1979 at Lesmahagow Priory uncovered several lead pipes.
- Quite possibly, this lead was obtained in the upper reaches of the Nethan Water, beyond Cumberhead, and about four miles southwest of Auchanbeg.
- En route to their lead mines, the monks of Lesmahagow would have walked right past the several coal outcrops at Auchanbeg.
- “Chapelhill” – shown on the 1802 Estate Plan – across the Nethan from Auchanbeg, suggests a Monks’ cell of sorts.
- Influence of the church faded and abbey lands given up
- “Bonnet lairds” took possession of a number of upper Nethan Valley farms



# 1708: Very Near Auchanbeg

- Auchanbeg was eventually added to the estate of Stockbriggs
- But prior to 1670, Auchanbeg was probably part of a “common muir”
- In 1670 the common ground called the Stockbridge and Coalburn muir was divided amongst local landowners – but evidently some terms of the agreement were too vague...
- In 1708 James Weir of Johnshill and James White of Stockbridge were accused by Gavin Hamilton of Hill of, within the pursuers ground, “*digg[ing] coall pittes and coalls, lymeston, freeston, and sells, uses and disposes thereupon*”.
- It would appear that some retail sales were conducted.



## Ordnance Survey c 1858 – Stockbriggs Coalburn Muir

National Library of Scotland

# 1745: Cost of Pumping Out Water

- In 1745 William Carmichael signed a ten year lease for the coal and lands at Coalburn belonging to George Weir of Kerse.
- Carmichael worked the coal for a number of years, but eventually gave up owing to the rising water.
- The water could not be carried off without the use of engines, the expense of which could not be spared.
- Carmichael abandoned his lease and left the country, leaving the lands lying wasted.
- Jack Auchinleck, Tacksman of the Coalworks at Over Stockbridge (appr. a mile away), inspected the coalheugh at Coalburn including the flooded Candle-coal and other seams.
- James Whyte (d 1756) of Stockbriggs apparently received decent income from the coal on the estate

# James McCowan, 1773-1834

- 1797 at Garlaff coalworks on Dumfries Estate in Old Cumnock, Ayrshire: *“By the men belonging to the work and others employed thereat”*
- 1799: Emancipation of the coalminers – possibly including James McCowan
- 1799: Leaves Garlaff to take the lease of the Auchanbeg Coalworks in Lesmahagow, Lanarkshire
- Coalmaster, lime merchant, general contractor, grocer, farmer
- 1813: Erected a fairly early steam engine in the south Lanarkshire coalfield
- 1817: Installed an underground rail system
- 1817: Contracted to embank the Nethan Water and excavates Scotland’s first “artificial” curling pond bringing in clay to seal in the water
- 1818: Outbid for renewal of his Auchanbeg coal lease but continues his coal and limestone works at Blackwood
- 1821: His mining operations are bankrupted, but carries on as a farmer
- 1829: Four-fold increase in rent on the farm of East Auchanbeg
- 1831: Sequestration proceedings
- 1833: Emigrates to Scarborough, Upper Canada, with his wife and 8 children



# Dumfries Estate, Ayrshire vs. Stockbriggs Estate, Lanarkshire

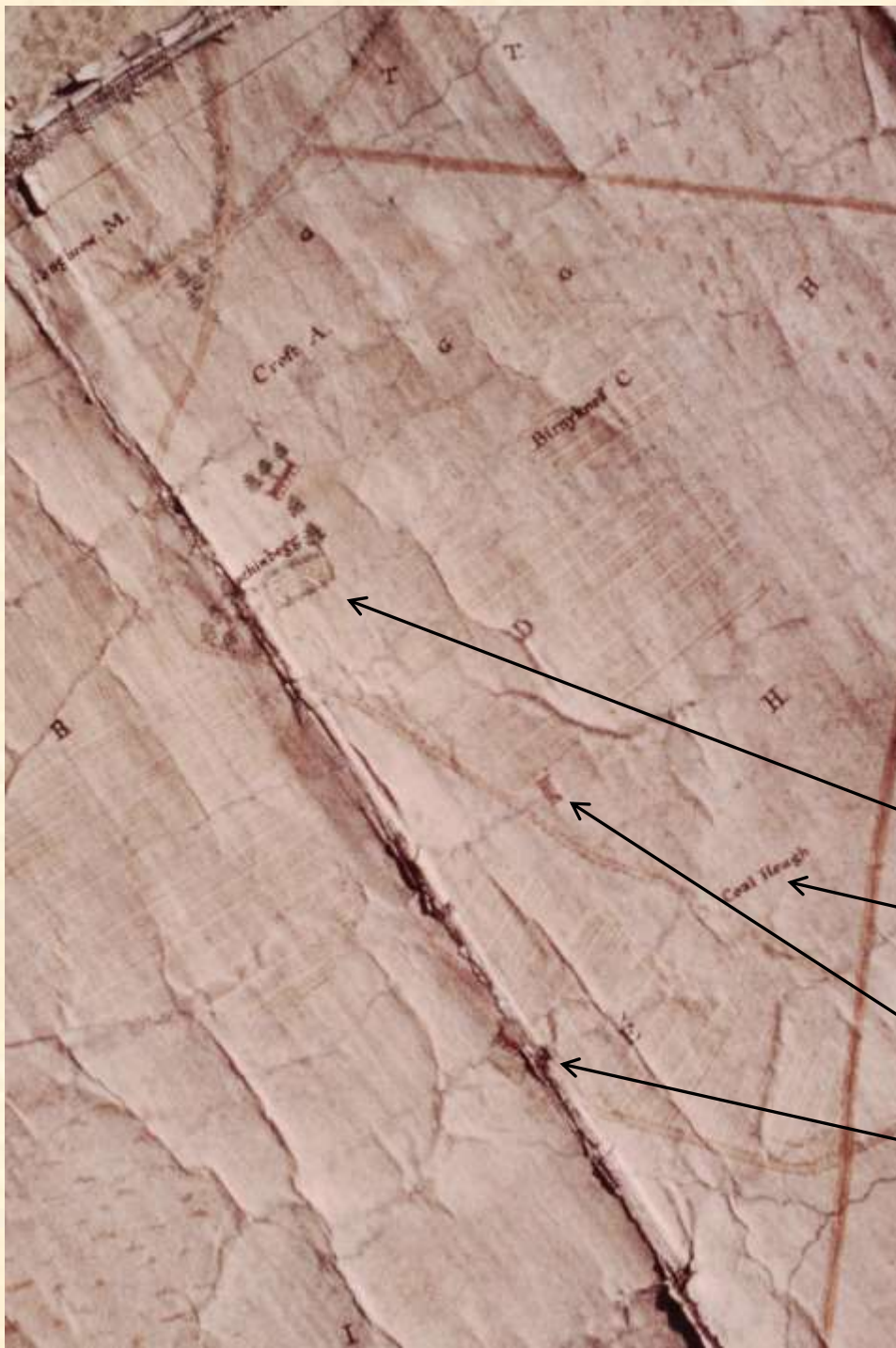
- Agricultural and rural change on Dumfries Estate in Old Cumnock was well-managed largely due to the cooperative and supportive landlord and his factors
- 1802: Stockbriggs estate was about 4 decades behind Old Cumnock in terms of agricultural improvement – landowner James Corbett finally takes inventory of his lands
- Early 19<sup>th</sup> c: Stockbriggs' tenants were supported by a sympathetic judicial factor during a decade of litigation
- But then, in 1828, a new Stockbriggs landowner applied principles of “improvement” to an extreme – including a four-fold rent increase

# Agricultural Improvement Starts in the Upper Nethan, c 1800



**Surveyed by  
James Whiteford  
1802**

**James Whiteford's  
1802 Plan  
South East Corner of  
Stockbriggs Estate**



West (or North) Auchanbeg

McCowan's first coal heugh or pit

Colliers' houses

East (or South) Auchanbeg  
(McCowan home, 1799-1833)



# Mentorship

James McCowan (26 years old at the start of his lease) was quite likely mentored by his friend, the 1802 surveyor James Whiteford, who was Blackwood Estate factor (ie manager) at the time.

Blackwood 1<sup>st</sup> October 1817

Sir

The favour of your company here on  
Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> Inst at 12 o'clock noon  
to attend the Funeral of James Whiteford  
my Father in law from this to the place of  
Interment in Leomahegaid Churchyard  
will much oblige

Sir

Your Humble Servant

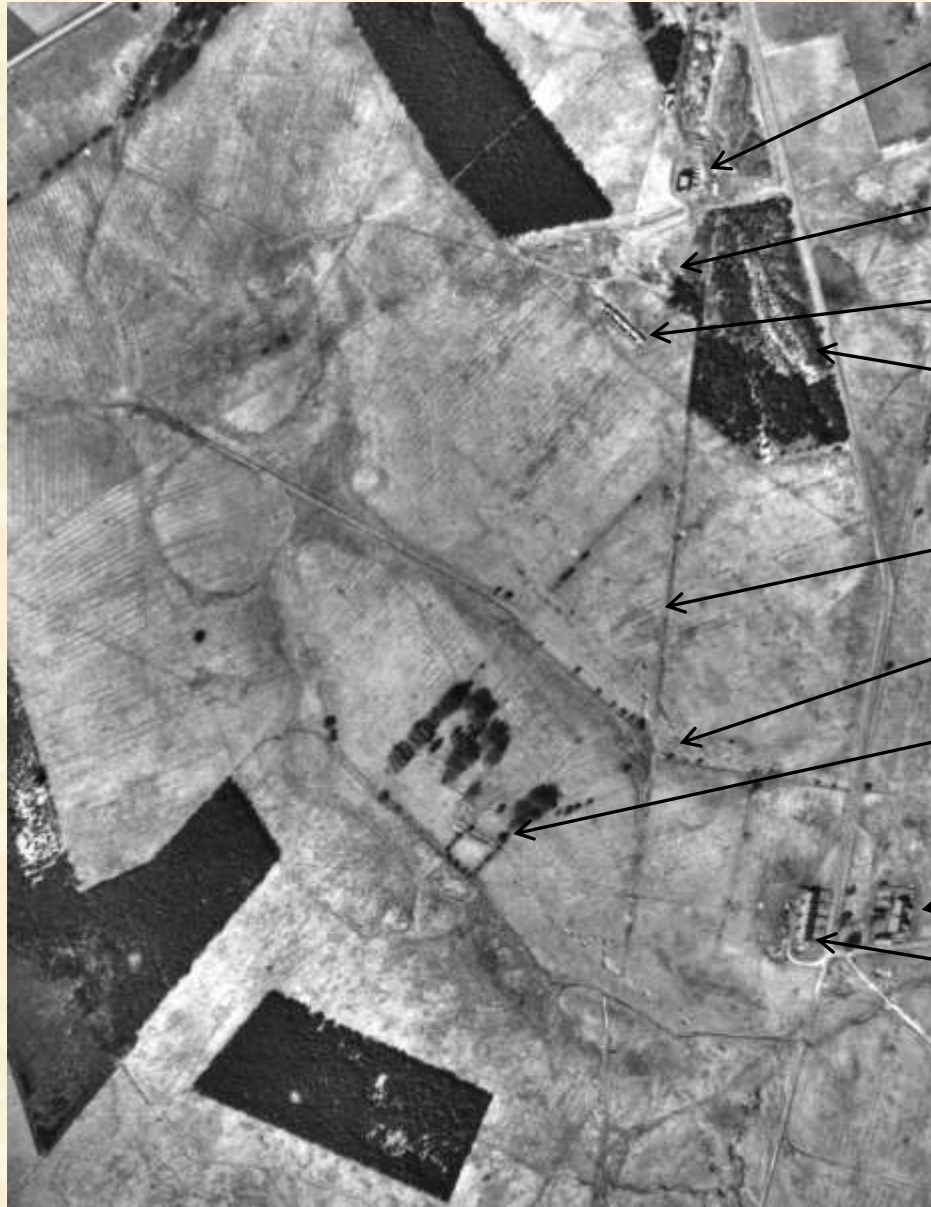
John Black

Mrs McCowan is also requested to attend the Funeral

J. B.



# Eagle's Eye View of Remains, 1946



Auchanbeg colliery (early 20<sup>th</sup> century)

Engine House, c 1810

"Top Row" (some brick walls)

Colliery's "Bonnie Bing" and Engine Row (collier houses)

Haulageway to Dalquhandy

"Coal Heugh" 1802 survey

East Auchanbeg and c1800 beech plantations

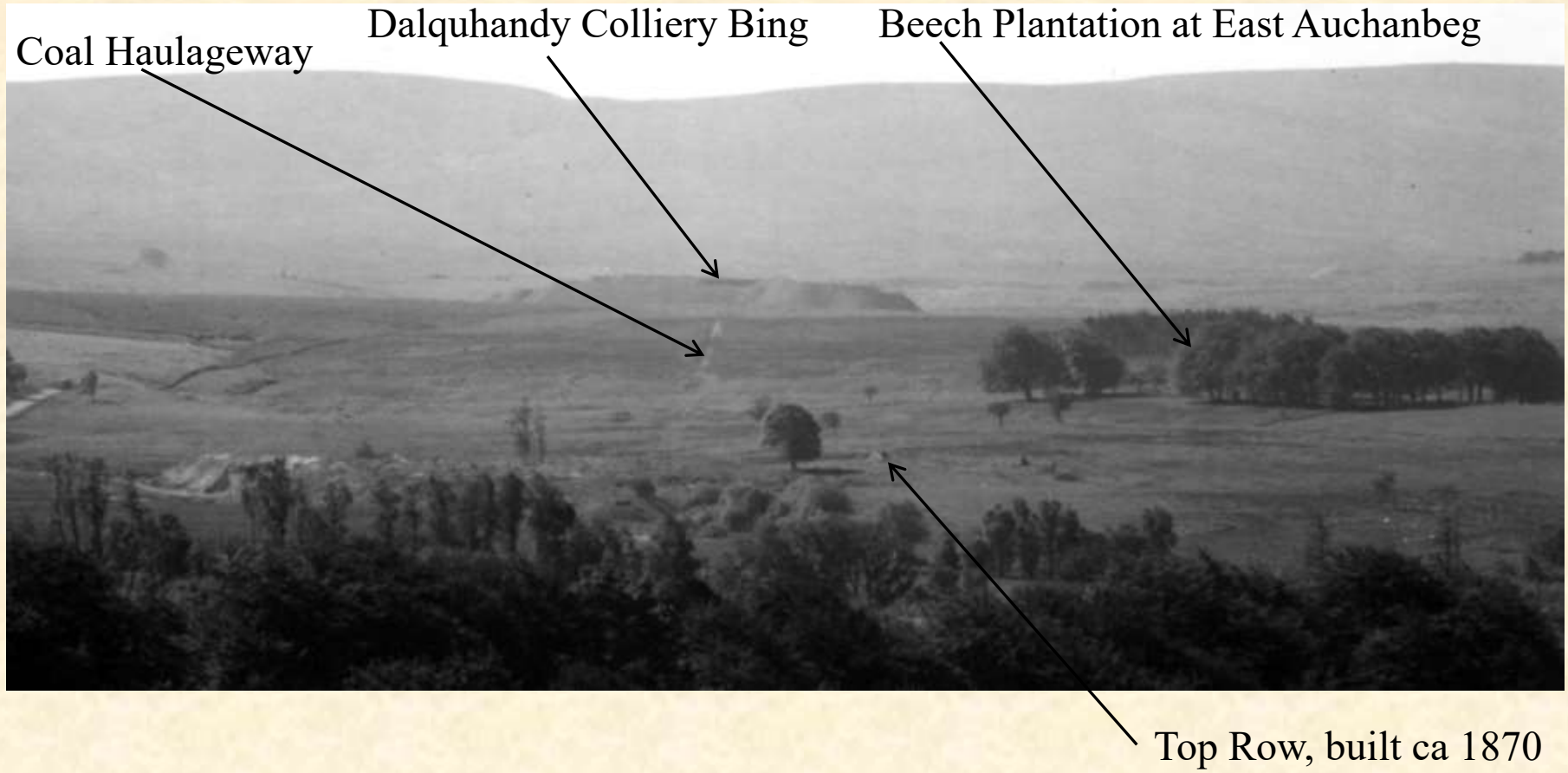
Shoulderrig

Colliery overseer's houses c1908

**3398 106G/SCOT/UK/81.RP.PT2.10/5/46**

# East Auchanbeg and Dalquhandy Bing

(Looking south from Warlaw Hill, 1979, Zoom Lens)





# East Auchanbeg to North



**Possibly steps down thru centre of garden**

**Far Right:** Bing at an Auchlochan pit

## Ian Buchanan's Large Scale Ordnance Survey, c1860

Thanks to Mr. Buchanan, Turlood Stockbriggs, for bringing out his various estate plans in 1979. Notations in pencil such as "*The Fore Park*" were probably made by the estate owner in about 1860. The quarry in "Old Engine Park" (4029) is the site of James McCowan's coal heugh when he first took the lease in 1799. "New Engine Park" (4017) shows the boiler and chimney of James McCowan's Engine House, built before 1813. Another survey copy was marked up with "Infield" / "Outfield".



# William Forrest Map, 1813-16

Thanks to Professor John Butt for confirming that William Forrest's symbol at "*Coal Work*" indicates that the coalmaster, James McCowan, had one of the relatively few steam engines in the south Lanarkshire coalfield at that time c1813.



# Sinkers Were Expensive

- To the end of the eighteenth century, coal pits would have been fairly shallow.
- Borers and sinkers were expensive personnel, many of them coming from England.
- These were the men who would “sink” a new shaft to deeper seams.
- James McCowan, the new colmaster at Auchanbeg in 1799, was fortunate in that he and his younger brother, John, were both skilled in this task.
- The steam engine house in “New Engine Park” would have been built to access a new vertical shaft c 1810

# Boring and Blowing Stones

- David McCowan (b 1775), a stone mason in Trinidad, wrote to his oldest brother, James McCowan in Auchanbeg, on April 4 1808:
  - *I wish likewise to have out a man like you or John [another brother] that is completely acquainted with boring and blowing stones.*
- While James McCowan was a coalmaster, he had to first get down to the coal seams. This meant working his way – with his boring and blowing tools -- through the limestone and ironstone at Auchanbeg.
- “Blowing” would be in reference to the use of explosives.



# Underground Rail System

- James McCowan recorded, in his account book in 1817, the purchase of rail nails, hutches, rails, sleepers for iron rails, and a horse gin.
- It appears that he installed a fairly early underground rail system for hauling coal

# Protecting the Wood in the Rail System

McCowan's account book records a recipe for varnish – probably used to protect the wooden bed of the rail system

# Families at Auchanbeg 1797-1820

**In no particular order**

This list is not complete. Families that lived at “Auchanbeg” (either East or West; for at least a short time) include the following:

Porteous\*, Rae, Johnston, Wharrie, Vass, Hamilton, Moffat, McCowan, McKinnon, McDermond, Hislop, McLean, Gooldie / Gold, Jamieson, Brown, Purdie, Lindsay, Proudfoot, Hislop, Muir

\* Farming family up to 1797. Not all of the above families were colliers.



# Attracting Colliers

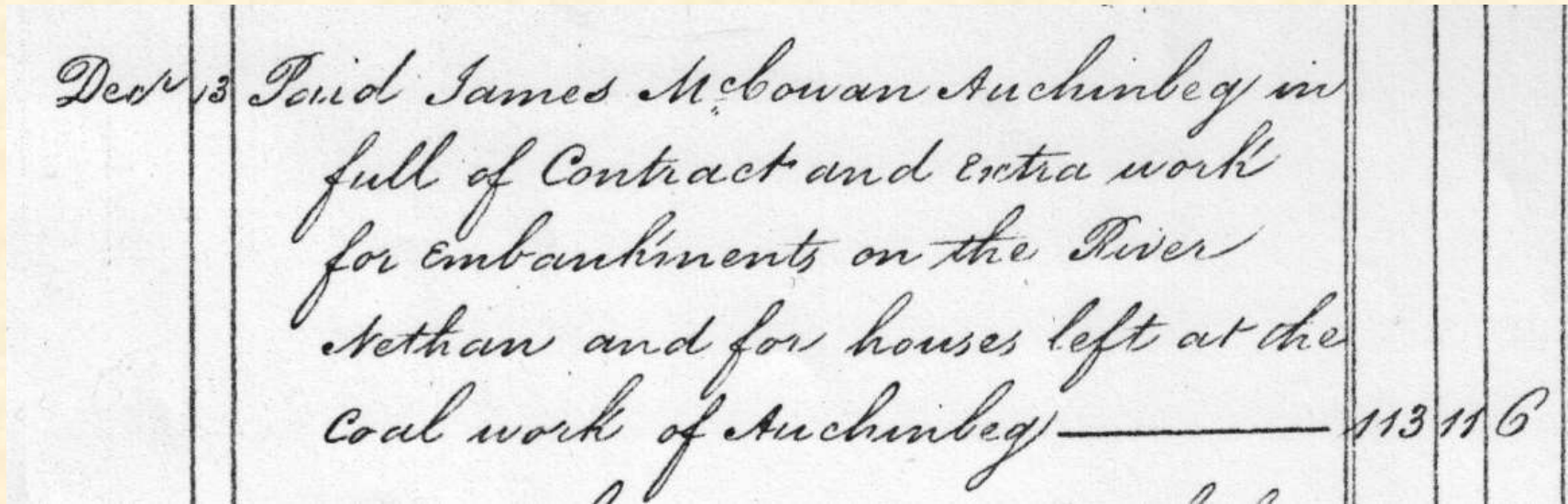
Finding good workers was probably not easy

James McCowan sometimes financed the “flitting” of a collier – but he had to work for McCowan for at least a year

# Grocer

2 J. David Moffat to Jas. McE. Dr.	
1814 to meet 8 pecks at $1\frac{1}{5}$	13 4
Agst to $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb tobacco	3 2
3 to 1 pint oil	2 6
6 to Cash	5
to Balance of meal	7
11 to tobacco $\frac{1}{2}$ lib	3 2
to 8 pecks meal $1\frac{1}{5}$	11 4
to $\frac{1}{2}$ lib tobacco	3 2
to 1 lib Soap	10
to a new riddle	4
to flitting	7
to Jas. Moffats ac	1 = 8 = 5

# Experienced River Embanking Contractor



Paid James McCowan Auchinbeg in  
full of Contract and extra work  
for embankments on the River  
Aethan and for houses left at the  
coal work of Auchinbeg ————— 113 116

Estate of Stockbriggs Report on Judicial Factor's Accounts, Page 72  
1819 “Repairs and Allowances to Tenants”

The Report is an incredible record of how landed estate litigation affected tenants.

Crown copyright, National Records of Scotland, CS96/1224

**“Extra Work”** – possibly for excavation of the curling pond for the tenants (farm rents were increased to pay for repairs to the mansion house because of the serious and damaging flood)



# East Auchanbeg Looking North, 1979



Note the “policies” of the ambitious proud young coalmaster:  
beech plantation on left c1800 & delineated garden in foreground.



# From Inside the “Policies” Looking North, 1987



Some planning went into this planting of beech trees c1800.



# The “Improved Mid-Range”, 1987





**The Only Slide in This ppt That was Printed Backwards!**  
**Placed Under a Foundation Stone in '74... Still there in '79**





# East Auchanbeg from Up a Tree, 1987

## Showing the Steading's L-Shape



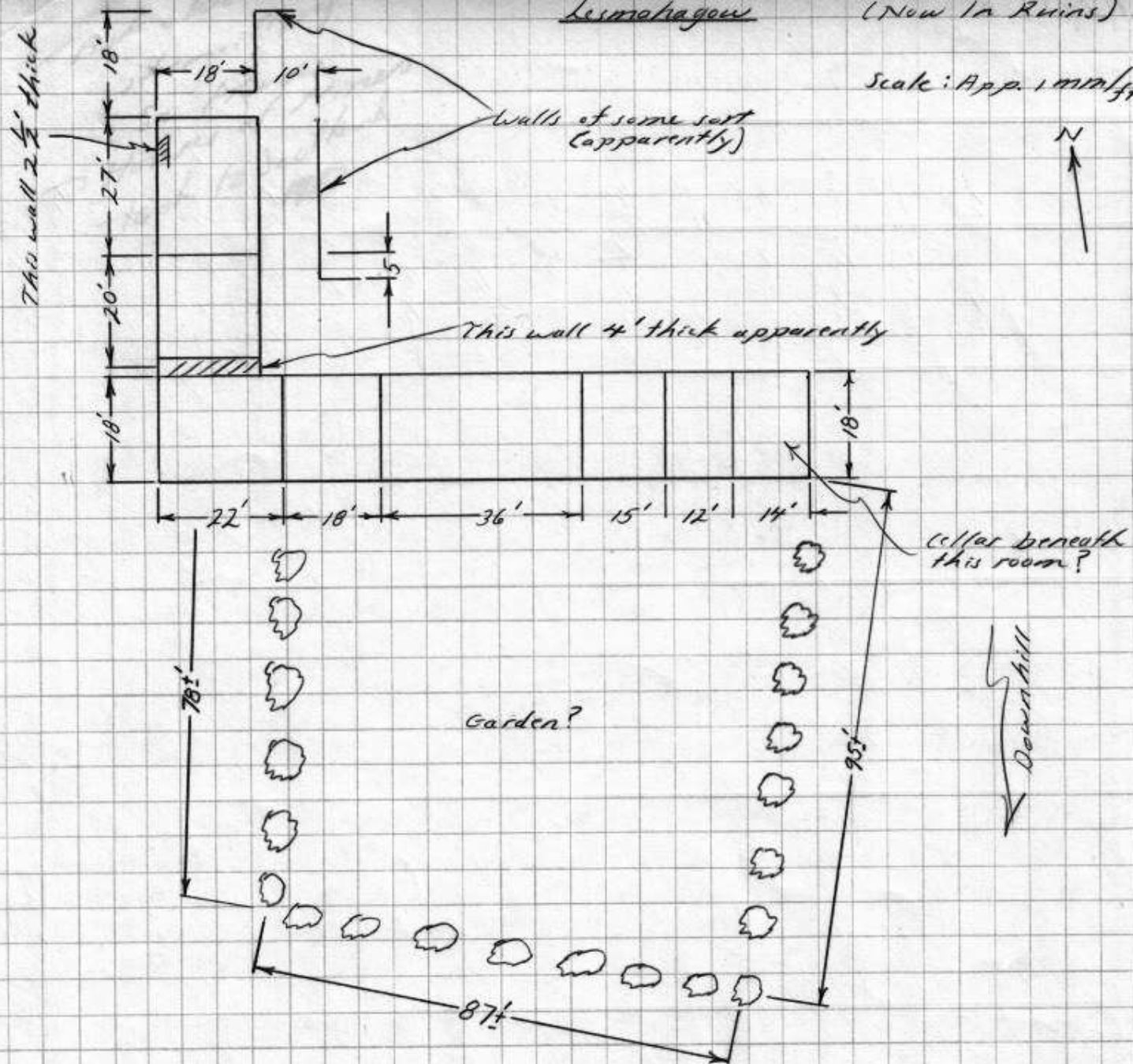


South (or East) Auchanbeg

Lismohagow

(Now In Ruins)

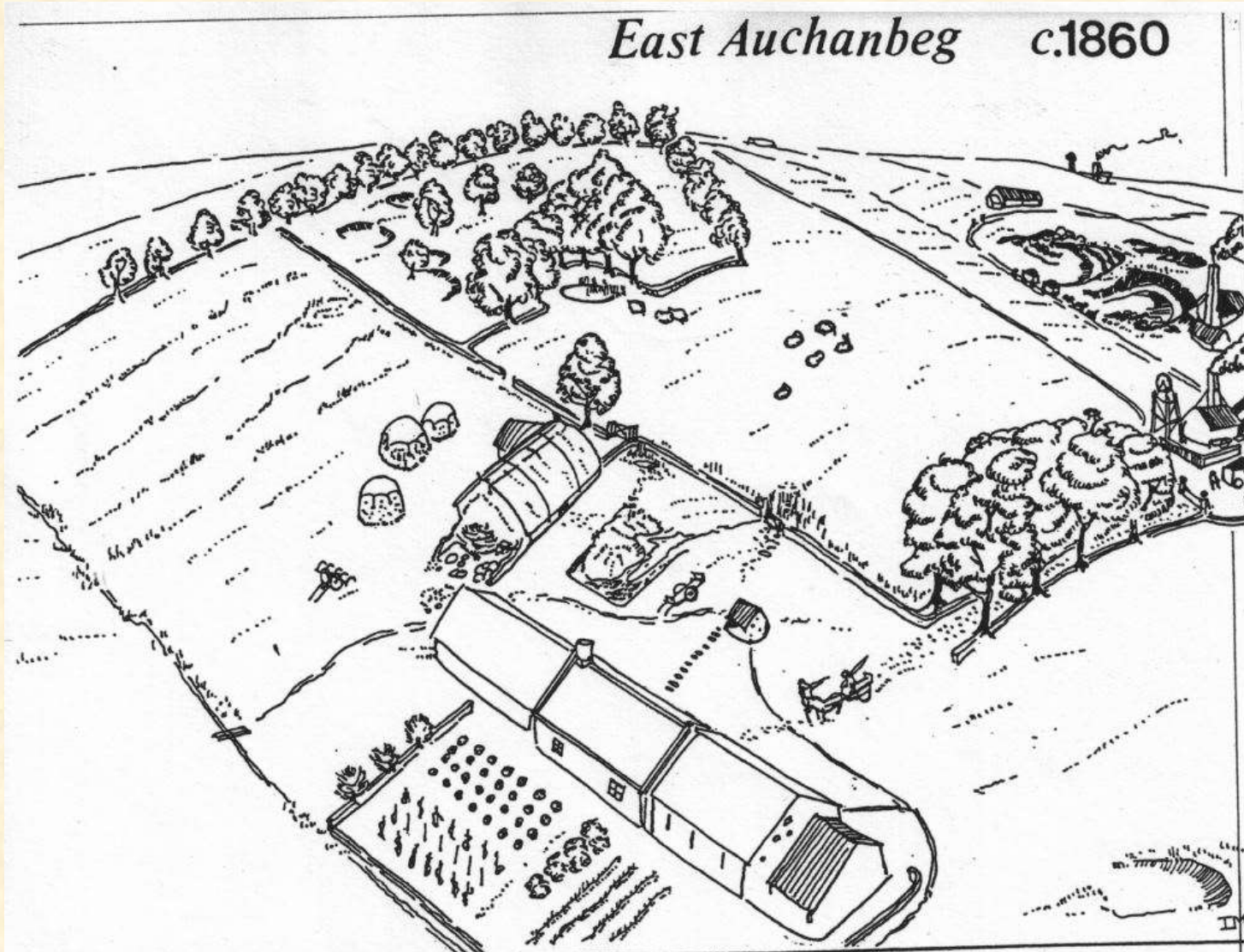
Scale: App. 1 mm/ft





# **Report on the 1990 Field Survey at Auchanbeg by the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists (ACFA)**

With many many thanks to the ACFA field survey team -- Scott, Leslie, Donald, Dennis, Veronica, Netta, Margaret, Roland, Ian, Carol



# East Auchanbeg, to East, 1984





# Avenue of Beech Trees Leading NE From East Auchanbeg toward “Coal Heugh”, 1987



In the foreground possibly  
a filled-in well.



# Looking East Toward East Auchanbeg Along Old Road From Fence, 1979



# Looking East Toward Shoulderrig and Coalburn, 1979





# The Community Rights / Freedoms



- Footpath, stile and march dyke looking south from Shoulderrig corner toward old Bankend coalworks area, 1987
- Perhaps used by James McCowan as he courted Margaret Porteous and possibly when he curled with the Douglas Parish boys (“curler” not yet proven)
- Apparently loss of the footpath during the Dalquhandy opencast caused a local stir



# Margaret Porteous McCowan, 1788-1866



Probably holding one of the many bibles in the Porteous and McCowan families, most of which we still have. Her father had farmed at Auchanbeg prior to the arrival of the McCowans in 1799. The Porteous family then moved to Douglas Parish, a few miles to the south. Margaret became the second wife of coalmaster James McCowan in Sept. 1813. Three months later she took her husband's illegitimate son, Robert, into her care. She raised him as her own, along with her own son, James Whiteford, born in April 1814. Margaret and James had a family of 9 at East Auchanbeg. One daughter died young.

# Margaret's Garden at East Auchanbeg Looking West, 1979



# “New Engine” House



Thanks to Bill Harvie. Bill's grandparents lived at Auchanbeg in “Top Row” in the 1930s. His father, Will, is standing in front of the old steam engine house that was probably built by James McCowan in about 1810. It is shown on Forrest's map of 1813-16. (Jim Hamilton and others supported this conjecture)



# Pit Accidents

James' youngest brother, William McCowan, was a collier at Auchanbeg. William wrote on November 27, 1837:

*"Young Jas Barr Auchanbeg was killed on the Shutharig quarie by a piece of the bare falling on him"*

The old “room and stoop” (or pillar) method of extracting coal left much “room” for accidents such as collapse of the overburden.

# Auchanbeg Colliery Main Shaft Area Looking South Toward East Auchanbeg, 1979

McCowan's ca 1810 Shaft

Top Row





# **Top Row Looking East – Just South of McCowan's Engine House, 1979**

**The bricks were probably made of Auchanbeg clay**





# Lime Kiln Exposed From Under Bing, 1989 (Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century)





## COUNTRY RESIDENCE AND SHOOTING QUARTERS.

*in the Upper Ward of Lanarkshire.*

To be LET, for one or more years, as may be agreed upon, from Whitsunday 1818,

**THE HOUSE and GARDEN of STOCKBRIGGS**, in the parish of Lesmahagow, together with any quantity of pasture ground adjoining which the tenant may incline to have.

The house consists of dining and drawing rooms, three bed-rooms, and light bed-closet, besides good garret-room, kitchen, and servants' apartments, and there is a complete court of offices adjoining, with coach-house, &c.

The house is delightfully situated in a beautiful glen on the banks of the river Nethan, where there is excellent fishing, as well as in the contiguous rivers of Douglas, and the Clyde and Logan Water, and the grouse and partridge shooting on the estate, of which the tenant will have the privilege, afford ample amusement to the sportsman. It is three miles from the populous village of Lesmahagow, to which there is an excellent road; a daily post by the London mail, which passes twice a-day, and where butcher-meat and all articles of grocery, &c. are to be

had. There is a going coal-work upon the estate, the tenant of which is bound to furnish the family at the house of Stockbriggs with a considerable quantity yearly at the hill.

Immediate access may be had to the premises if agreeable, and without any additional rent.

For particulars apply to James Lindsay, Esq. 64. Hutcheson Street, Glasgow; or to John Lawson, W. S. Edinburgh.

William Pate, at Meadow, will show the house.

## Bound to Furnish...

Did McCowan's 19-year coalworks lease account for inflation or was the "considerable quantity yearly" fixed for the duration?

*Edinburgh Evening Courant,*  
April 16, 1818:

*National Library of Scotland*

# Potential Legal Issues Between Farmer and Coalmaster: Surface Damage



**Line of subsidence just north of East Auchinbeg  
Looking northwest, taken from a tree, 1984**



# By the End (1818) of His Coalworks Lease James McCowan Account Book

The East Level of the  
Anorthyless mine  
got was done at the  
termination of my  
lease 113 fathoms and  
the west one  
was done 94 fathoms



# Deeper Pockets Prevailed: McCowan Outbid for Renewal of Lease, 1818

**COAL TO LET.**  
To be LET, for such a number of years as can be  
agreed upon, from Martinmas next,  
**T**HE GOING COAL WORK, at AUCH-  
INBEGG, on the Estate of Stockbriggs,  
parish of Lesmahagow, at present wrought by Jas.  
M'Cowan, with the Houses, &c. belonging thereto.  
Offers will be received by J. LAWSON, Esq. W.S.  
31, Albany Street, Edinburgh; or by Mr JOHN  
LAMB, writer in Lanark, until Friday the 16th day  
of October next, when Mr Lawson will meet with  
the offerers at Lesmahagow, to conclude a bargain  
Edinburgh, Sept. 22, 1818.

*Edinburgh Advertiser, Tues. Oct. 6 1818*  
*Thanks and Credit to the National Library of Scotland*



# Creditors Become Trustees

The respondent was a workman at the Auchanbeg colliery, for some time previous to February 1816. At this date, the affairs of Mr. James M'Cowan, by whom the colliery was carried on, having become embarrassed, he called a meeting of his creditors, when it was agreed that he should execute a trust-deed in favour of the petitioner, and of other two gentlemen of the name of Finlay and Mackersy.

Feb. 19,  
1816.

Of this deed, there is a copy in process. The trustees themselves were also creditors; and it is material that your Lordships should observe, that the testing clause expressly declares, that it is signed by the trustees, both as creditors, and in testimony of their acceptance as trustees. It is signed by all the other creditors in testimony of their accession to the trust. The testing clause is in these terms: "In witness whereof these presents, &c. are

# Re-Financing Fails, 1821

I now all more by these presents, that I James Mc Cowan Coalmaster in Auchinbeg. Considering that in breaking up & carrying the various Lime & Coal works now occupied by me in the parish of Sornburgh, of which I am the tacksmen, I have not only exhausted my own funds, but indebted to various persons, now my creditors in sundry sums of money which at present I am unable to discharge, and that I have become so much embarrassed in my circumstances as to be unable to carry on without aid, the said Coal & Lime works, any longer to advantage. And believing that if the said works were managed & carried on with propriety, for a few years to come they would not only yield a clear profit sufficient for the payment of all my debts presently owing, but would soon create a considerable surplus.



# Bankruptcy, 1821

A. sequestrating the estates of Ja. M'Cowan coal and lime merchant at Blackwood, and late coal merchant and grocer at Auchinbeg, in the parish of Lesmahagow, and county of Lanark; and *Intimation* to his creditors to meet in the house of Mrs Peat, innkeeper in Lanark, on Tuesday the 16th January curt. at one o'clock afternoon, to name an interim factor, and at the same place and hour, on Tuesday the 6th day of February next, to elect a trustee, and interdicting the sale of the said James M'Cowan's pointed effects, p. Baird. L. Gillies, Ordinary.

Tho. Russel, A. Dated 4th Jan. 1821.

, Intim. that Ja. Pringle tanner in Haddington, has applied for renewal of his personal pro-

# **What Went Wrong? Contributing Factors:**

## **Coal Cartel of Robert Gray of Carntyne**

The powerful coal cartel near Glasgow might have been a factor in preventing James McCowan from becoming a successful industrialist in Lanarkshire.



# Backing Debts of a Brother

## David McCowan's Import Business in Trinidad

*Port Spain Trinidad Jun 14th 1816*

*... I was truly sorry to see how you had been treated by that man Smith... I have many times wished that your name had not been on his bills I would have made him come hear before he ever got sixpence from me and then his mean and cruel conduct to you puts me out of all patience with him...*

James McCowan's undelivered letter of Aug. 20 1834 to friend James Lang seems to refer to a rumour about mason David McCowan's death, perhaps over some skullduggery regarding unpaid debts...

*I refceived your letter of the 6th July anonncing the death of the mafson which I am sorry to hear and mor so on acount of the maner in which he came by it... if there is any thing to be got of the mafson's effects I hope you will do all for me that you can as I will be a lofser by him to a considerable amount.*

# Cattle Breeding

- Muir Johnston was the successful bidder for the lease of Auchanbeg Coalworks in 1818
- James McCowan got the lease on East Auchanbeg farm and found a niche in cattle breeding around local farms



# Verbal 7-Year Lease on Auchanbeg Farm

## Expires with Other Farms in 1824

Deliberate tactic of the Judicial Factor to help sell the estate

*Rental of the Estate of Stockbriggs Crop 1821.*

	<i>Possessions</i>	<i>Entry</i>	<i>Endurance years</i>	<i>Expiry</i>	<i>Tenants</i>	<i>Obligations</i>	<i>Remarks</i>	<i>Hairs</i>	<i>Days work 2 horses &amp; carts but banking</i>	<i>Rents</i>
1.	Holmhead	March 1805	19	March 1824	John Kirkwood	Pays all Public Burdens and 6% per Cent on En- closures - leaves Dung		6	1	£34 . .
2.	Craighead	"	"	"	William Wharries			"	"	128 . .
3.	Yondertown	M. 1807	17	"	Thomas Pate	All Public Burdens of every kind - 6% per Cent on Enclosures - leaves Dung		12	2	105 . .
4.	Clughbrae	M. 1817	7	M. 1824	William Johnston	All Public Burdens		8	"	68 . .
5.	Meadow	"	"	"	William Pate			6	"	55 . .
6.	Auchanbeg	"	"	"	Widow Wharries	No Lease		"	"	25 . .
7.	Part of Dills	"	"	"	James Mcbowan	No Lease		"	"	16 16 .
8.	Coal	M. 1818	10	M. 1827	Muir Johnston	Or a Lordship of 1/6 of the price of Croft Sales		"	"	110 . .

# Lawyer John Gibson Became Owner 1828

## Articles of Lease

### Four-Fold Rent Increase, 1829

*Articles of Lease of the Farms on  
the Estate of Stockbriggs - Entry as at Martin  
mas One thousand eight hundred and twenty  
nine as to the Arable lands, and Whitsunday  
One thousand eight hundred and thirty as  
to the houses and Grass - The first terms  
rent payable at Whitsunday One thousand  
and eight hundred and thirty and  
the next terms rent at ~~the same~~  
thereafter. —*

# **“Cleared” from the Land**

## **Emigration to Canada, 1833**

- Proprietor, John Gibson, was “Procurator Fiscal” and knew his way around the law
- Purchased Stockbriggs Estate 1828
- Presumably ripped up the leases of 1824-5 to impose his own terms -- at huge rent increases
- Several other longstanding tenants also left Stockbriggs during this short period – however you choose to spin it, this is really a case of “Lowland Clearance”
- In the spring of 1833, James and Margaret McCowan took their family of 8 to a new life at the edge of the clay Scarborough Bluffs in Canada – at “Springbank”



# **BBC Radio Scotland “Lowland Clearances” Series, 2003**



Andrew Cassel and Bruce McCowan at Springbank

# Stockbriggs’ “Commodious Court of Office Houses”, 1987



Built mid 1820s,  
probably to  
attract a buyer for  
the estate, then in  
some turmoil.

# Families at Auchanbeg 1821-1840

**In no particular order**

This list is not complete. Families that lived at (East or West) Auchanbeg (for at least a short time) include the following:

Hall\*, Muir, Carruthers, Coupland, Barr, Boyd, Wharry, Jack, Shearer, Sloan, McLean, McCowan, McGachie, Carmichael, Menzies, Gemmel, Dickson, Redi, Scott\*, Tennant

\*By 1820 John Hall had succeeded Muir Johnston as Auchanbeg Coalmaster, but by 1837 Killie Scott was Coalmaster (William McCowan letters). Not all of the above families were colliers.



# 1836 - Disrepair

James' youngest brother, William McCowan, collier at Auchanbeg, kept the family informed, post-emigration:

*... the coalmaster who is now Killie Scott and his son Jas that drove the coals from you. John Hall is now coalmaster of Flochans [Auchlochan] as he has it now in tack so that he will not see Canada for some time...Mr. Gibson according to report has sold off the whole of the land [Stockbriggs] except Todlaw to a Mr. Alston Glasgow who has bought also Yondertown and Holmhead... Old Goathouse is now setting Auchenbegg to Wm Jack Yondertown it is believed he has lost a good dale of money by it and the houses are almost bare walls now as they have not been repaired since you left them and I think few of his neighbours are sorry at his lose...*

# **Families at Auchanbeg 1841-1861**

**In no particular order**

This list is not complete. Families that lived at (East or West) Auchanbeg (for at least a short time) include the following:

Morton, Robertson, Denholm, Cameron, Ferguson, Grierson, Howie, Adams, Cooper, Inch, Clark, Daryman, McLean\*.

\* The coalmaster 1859-71 appr was John McLean. Not all of the above families were colliers.

# Stockbriggs Mansion, 1987

Built mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by J.W. Alston of Stockbriggs





# Engine Row Looking North 1979



Also known as Bottom Row

The c 1860 Ordnance Survey shows two distinct buildings.

With bing and Warlaw Hill beyond.

# Engine Row

## Looking North, 1984

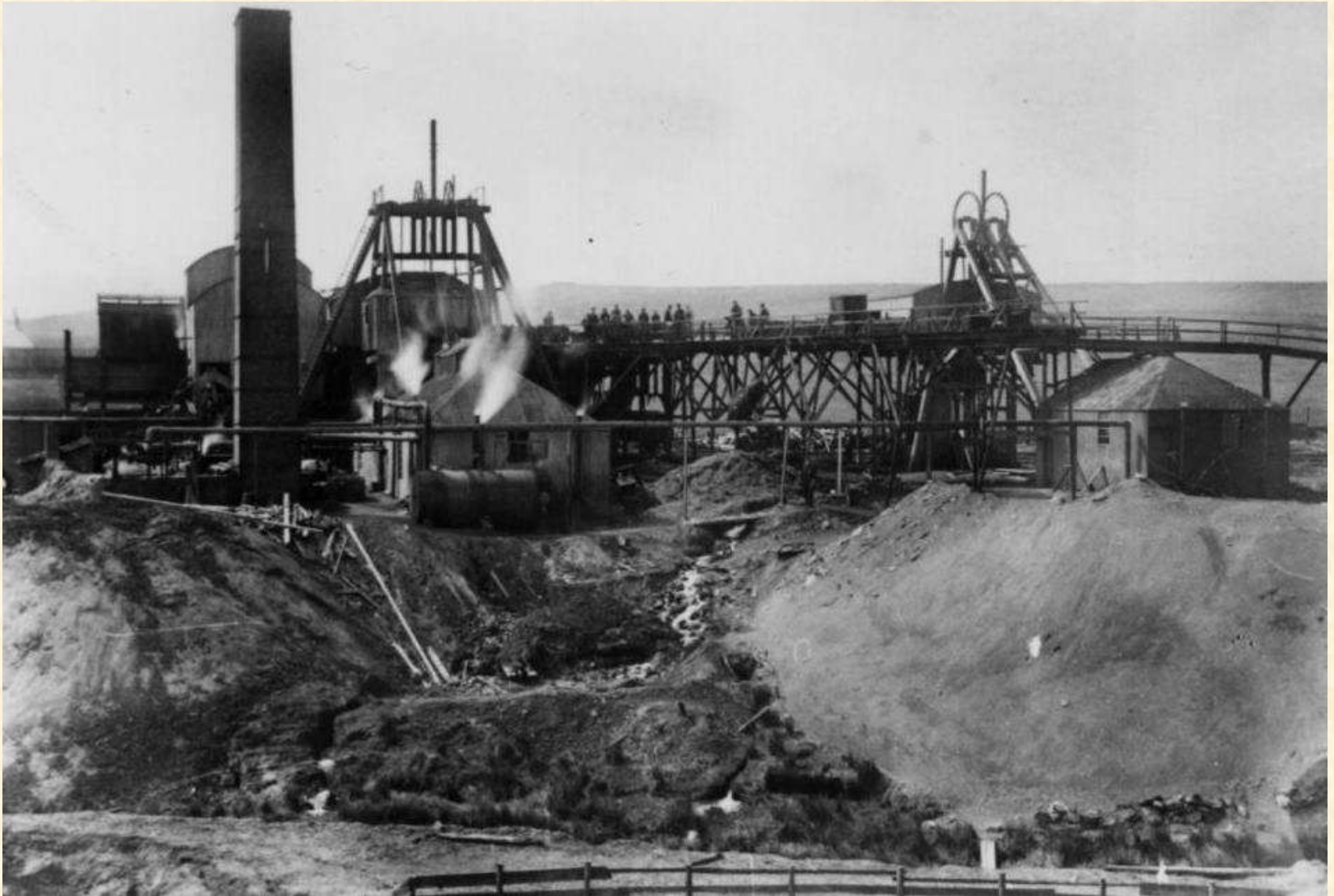


- In 1818 James McCowan was out-bid for the coal lease but continued farming East Auchanbeg
- Coal mining at Auchanbeg continued under other coalmasters
- Engine Row's first 4-unit building probably built ca 1820 shortly after East Auchanbeg farm was separated from the Auchanbeg Coalworks
- Second 4-unit building probably built ca 1855
- All 8 units were approx. 21 ft x 20 ft



# Auchanbeg Colliery, Pits 1&2, c 1900

Received from Jim Hamilton





# Auchanbeg Colliery North Shaft, 1979

300+ ft deep; 200+ workers; Operated 1901-1922





# Looking North Along the Endless Haulageway From Near Big Bridge Mine, 1979



# East Along Watercourse From Fence Corner to Mine To 9 Foot Coal, 1979





# **From 50 Ft North of Fence Corner - NE Along Hedge Toward Bing - In the Area of the Mine to Smithy Coal Outcrop, 1979**





# **North Along Haulage Way, Mine to Smith Coal, Bore Sample, Air Shaft Near Fence, 1979**



# “Remains” of Coalminers’ Recreation



- The colliery owners held a sports day for the miners
- This is the “Auchenbegg Trophy” – for a number of years (probably 1950s-60s) it was a trophy at the Hollandbush Golf Club
- Apparently it does not go back as far as the Auchenbegg Miners sports days (as late as the early 1920s)
- A gift to the presenter from Helen Walker in the late 1980s



# Boring Samples, 1984



- Found between the two buildings at Engine Row
- A drill rig was on-site during the presenter's visit in 1974 – open-cast seemed imminent

# **Open Cast Work**

## **Looking West to East Auchanbeg Beech Plantation**

**Courtesy of Jim Hamilton, 1991**





# The James McCowan Memorial Social History Initiative



Placing the Scottish-Canadian farm family within  
the larger context of their community

**[www.mccowan.org](http://www.mccowan.org)**

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- Staff at Cumnock and Doon Valley District Library and other Scottish repositories



# Primary Sources

- Coal seam records, Auchenbeg Colliery, ca 1924, National Coal Board
- *Plan of Part of the Lands of Stockbriggs Shewing the Mineral Workings Therein 1870*
- *Geological Survey of Scotland, Edition of 1912*
- *Geological Survey, 1871*
- *Report on the 1990 Field Survey at Auchanbeg by the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists (ACFA)*
- *Court of Session records relating to Stockbriggs including:*
  - CS96/1224
  - CS229/S/15/50
- Scottish Record Office, GD27/1/369/1, 1708
- SRO cc14/5/18 Inventory, Jas. Whyte of Stockbridge, 1756
- James McCowan's papers, letters, account book & library
- William McCowan letters, 1836 and 1837

# Further Reading

- ***How the Works is Going: A Preview of the Physical Remains at Auchanbeg, Lesmahagow, In Advance of the Dalquhandy Open Cast***, DRAFT Oct. 1989
- <http://mccowan.org/riseofa.htm> (“Rise of a Coalmaster”)
- <http://mccowan.org/coaland.htm> (“Coal and the Land”)
- <http://mccowan.org/whenthe.htm> (“***When the Ground Fails***”)
- <http://mccowan.org/james3.htm> (“James McCowan”)
- <http://mccowan.org/tenant.htm> (“Tenant Structure, Stockbriggs”)
- <http://mccowan.org/winners.htm> (A new angle on the lowland clearances)
- ***The Lowland Clearances: Scotland’s Silent Revolution***, Peter Aitchison and Andrew Cassell (Chapter 8)
- ***A Field Survey at Coalburn, Lanarkshire***, Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists
- ***We’re Not Here to Put in Time: Ramblings on a Scottish-Canadian Work Ethic***, with Bill McCowan
- ***Well Taught the Value of a Shilling -- Numeracy, Financial Literacy, Earning an Honest Living & Related Ramblings*** with George Edward McCowan
- ***The Hog-Score in the Great Rink of Time***: Curling in Scotland 1500-1900
- ***Stockbriggs Curling Pond ca 1817: Challenging a Curling History Myth***

**Many thanks for your attention**

**Questions and Comments?**

**[www.mccowan.org/publicat.htm](http://www.mccowan.org/publicat.htm)**