

Fife Mining Heritage Society would like to thank Mr David Chalmers Gemmell of the Fife Arms Hotel in Limekilns for allowing us to reproduce the following poems, which are part of a book of poems written by his uncle David Chalmers Gemmell who was Manager/Agent of the Wellesley Colliery in the 30's and 40's. His uncle was a great supporter of the **BEVAN BOYS** and received an MBE for his work in the mining industry and died in 1955. The poems shown below come from a Book of Scots Prose, which his uncle wrote around the early 1940's. One of his uncle's sons William Gemmell was also a manager at the Wellwood but sadly died at the age of 50. David also had a brother Bob who worked in the Wellesley for 20 years before moving to the Francis where he subsequently retired from.

SELECTED VERSES

D C GEMMELL

INTRODUCTION

This selection of verses is published at the repeated request of many friends. I can only hope that my readers in perusing them may deprive as much pleasure as I have had in writing them.

Some of the verses originally appeared in The Evening Times (Glasgow), The Kilmarnock Standard, and The Colliery Guardian. I acknowledge with gratitude the permission to reprint so readily granted by the editors of these periodicals.

D.C.G.

Note. At the end of the selection of poems is a glossary of Scots words used and their English translation.

THE STRIPPER

They've measured aff my stent,
The burstin' shots neen fired,
A shoogly pick an' soople shule,
That's a' the graith required.

I boo my back tae the treadmill task,
An' shovel like hell a' day,
While the greedy pans aye cry for mair,
Like a hungry beast o' prey.

They wriggle along their snake-like track,
An groan 'neath their getherin' load,
We curse an'sweat, an' pile them high,
Frae the tap tae the loading road.

Already it's nearly cornin' time'
An' half o' the wa's tae strip'
The gaffers comin' doon the run'
An, I ken that I'am for tor "gyp."

There's a prop ayont the distance,
There's anaither ane so ticht,
Fain wad I sauce the blighter,
But I ken in my hert he's richt,

Sae I turn again tae my weary darg,
An, smither my discontent,
Wi' a'e e'e fixed on lowsin' time,
An' ane on the end o' my stent.

Had strippin, been pairt o' the plan Divine,
If a thoght tae God did tak'
He wad shairly hae granted me fewer brains,
An, gied me a stronger back.

ROOF CONTROL

Wee Jock Macdonald's deid'
A stane fell frae the roof,
Jock passed awa frae oot our ken,
Like stoor blawn aff your roof.

We'll miss wee Jock:
O' a' oor ploys he wis the life,
He had twa bonnie bairns,
Forbye a tidy, thrifty wife.

The experts cam the next day'
Wi' their tools and gear,
They measured high, they measured low,
They sampled far and near.

They spak a language that tae us
Seemed learned and obscure'
They differed much amang themsel's,
Yet each wis sae cocksure.

Each had his ain pet theiry,
An' ane, a lanky loon'
Spak lang an' earnestly aboot
The phases o' the moon.

An' strangest o' it a' tae us'
Wis hoo he seemed tae ken
The things that happened far abune'
An' happened far 'er ben.

They gathered up their tools at last,
An' talking still ga'ed but,
While we wi, chastened thochts began
Tae clear awa the cut.

The Section Gaffer-Sandy Gray'
Said "Imph" an' scratched his heid,
"If Jock had set the prop in time'
Puir Jock wad ne'er been deid"

THE PAY LINE

Seven an' a quarter shifts at ten an' three,
They mak me up that's the Coonty rate,
Fixed on a basis, firm as Heaven's degree,
Settled lang syne, way back in eighty-eight,

I've often wunnert why they chose this date,
Year o' big wind or fell short corn,
Maybe a year when frost an' snaw were late'
Mair like a year that some big noise was born.

I've got some overtime, on Sabbath last I wroght,
That got me oot, tae brush the wee horse lye,
I wisna sweert tae gang when socht,
It mak's a graun exkase tae gie the Kirk a bye.

My afftaks noo, I'd better gie a scan,
Picksherpin, weelfare, doctor, baths, an' coal,
There's unemployment, Lloyd George, the baun,
Add, then subtract, it mak's a hefty hole.

A drawin' tae ane wha needs it sair,
Ten dreary months sin he was in a job,
'Tis true they say the puir can help the puir,
An' only hertless folk wad grudge a bob.

My union dues, an' sae anither saxpence bangs,
The dwinlin total's getting less,
I wonner whar this Union siller gangs,
'Tis only themsels an' God can guess.

I had some thocht a bob or twa tae scan'
Tho' that is maybe clean again the rules,
I'm gled I niver was a fitba' fan,
But I like a flutter on the "Pools."

Hard earned oor siller an' the darg is sair,
It's only they da'et that ken it,
But ten times ower I'd da'et mair,
Than hae the job o' Meg tae spen it.

THE LAGGARD

Hey Jock! Get up, it's nearly six o'clock
My mither cries aft frae doon the stair,
I draw the blankets closer ower my heid,
Tae keep her quate I rattle lood the chair.

My mithers patience dune, my faither's angry word,
Gars me come shufflin doon an' don my auld pit rags,
"Here gies my flask, my piece, my carbide, an' my lamp,"
I bang the door, cry "Cheerio," ach gosh I near forgot my fags.

The snotty at the check box says, " My lad, you're late,"
Keeked thro' the bole an' started up a row,
I scooted past an' doon the gangway ran,
An' by a nose jist nabbed the hinmost tow.

I speired the Fireman gin my place wis clear,
Ye're like the coo's tail' laddie, aye ahin'
Ye'll mind yer manners or we'll mak' a change,
Tae steady backshift, then ye'll no sleep in."

The dayshift's bad eneugh, the nichtshift's waur,
But feth the backshift's mair than I can thole,
I'll tell auld girnie rab tae gies the seck,
I'll lift my books, sign on, an' draw the dole.

AN AULD SCOTS COLLIER'S SOLILOQUY

I'm jist an auld Scots collier'
O' ordnar sense an' wit'
For raither mair than three score years,
I've laboured doon the pit.

In my time I've seen some changes'
Things are different noo at weel'
Airn men, conveyor pans an' belts'
Circle girders, trees o' steel.

I didna like these innovations'
But someone they aye cam tae stey,
We found them no sae ill's we thocht them'
Aince we'd got intae there way.

But noo they've put the tin lid on it'
The time has come to mak' a stan',
We've a' been telt tae wear a helmet'
An' shammy gloves on ilka haun.

Niver wis sic mollycoddlin',
Lassie's gloves, an' dinkie hat'
Fancy me, a puir auld collier,
Guan tae wark a sicht like that.

The ither nicht at lousin' time,
The gaffer tell't me flat'
That I'd hae tae tak' my notice'
Or wear a Safety Hat.

Glowered ower at the crater,
An' I sent him stracht tae Hell'
,An' added "as ye gang that gate,
Jist wear the Hat yersel".

I hadna ga'en far up the dook,
Till a bouten gat me fair'
Jist on the croon o' my auld pate'
Where I'm raither scant o' hair.

I never stopped but strauchered hame,
Wi' mony a groan an' curse,
The aukd wife gat the wind up
Aan ca'ed the District Nurse.

The lassoock sorted up my pow,
As on a stool I sat,
Then she capped insult on injury,
When she speired, "Where wis yir hat?.

But bid a wee-on second thochts,
An' second thochts are whiles the best,
I'm ga'en awa tae get a hat,
An' wear it, like the rest.

NANE SING O' COAL

A daisy crushed a'neath this sward,
Inspired the Muse o' Scotia's Bard
Stirred to its depths the plooman's soul,
There's nane hae sung sic sangs o' coal.

The sailor has his sangs galore,
O' toil at sea an' joys ashore'
He cheerily sings o' the roarin' main,
An' his shanties rise wi' a lood refrain.

The fishwife bending 'neath her creel,
Seekin' her markets far afiel',
The closses echo thro' an' thro',
Her cheerfu' cry o' "caller Ou".

On muirlan' road an' village street,
In winter's cauld an' simmer's heat'
The tousy tinkers snools alang,
Croonin' alood his bawdrie song.

Maybe someday a bard will rise,
An' laud the collier tae the skies,
Gie him a tune tae warble lang'
An' ease his burden wi' a sang.

ON RETIRAL

My stent is cleared, my darg is dune;
The time has come for me tae gang,
My weel worn graith I've laid aside:
I've reached the endin' o the sang.

I'm hale in body, soond in limb'
The passing years hae spared me weel:
My wind may fail me noo an' then'
The braes are steeper noo tae speil.

But time ne'er fails tae lea' its mark'
Twice blest is he wha' understauns'
Tae lea' new tasks tae fresher minds'
An' pass the TORCH tae younger hauns.

Someday a problem may confront
An' doots arise anent the way;
Aiblins they'll pause while some ane spiers,
"At sic a time, whit wad the **AULD ANE** dae?"

THE FIFERS PRAYER

O Thou who dwellest up on high
Hear my petition when I pray;
Shower Thy blessings on the land'
Especially that twixt Forth and Tay.

We are Thy chosen folks, O Lord,
Wi' wisdom we are gifted high;
Oor enemies wad us traduce;
They even dare to ca'ys **FLY**

There's some wad build a brig, O Lord,
Frae shore tae shore across the Forth.
They say 'twad open up the way
And gie them access tae the North.

Frustrate their plans, O lord, I pray;
Hear this my earnest prayer and call;
It,s no a brig we awnt, O Lord;
We'd raither hae a big strong wall.

O build it big and high and strong
Tae keep incomers back frae **"WE"**
But leave a crannie here and there
That we may "gang oot ower" an' see.

O grant tae us a' guid things, Lord;
For surely we deserve the best;
Preserve oor, protect oor hames
Frae thae incomers frae the west.

Hear these humble prayers, O Lord;
An answer gie us-syne
The gain shall be ours only. Lord,
The Glory shall be Thine.

GLOSSARY

A'e	One	Aft	often	Aiblins	Perhaps
Ain	Own	Aince	once	Airn	Iron
Airtin	Goint towards	Ane	one	Antrin	Occasional
Arweel	Truly	Auld	old	Awa	away
Aye	Always	Ayont	Beyond		
Baird	Beard	Bedral	Church beadle	Ben	Inwards
Birl	Spin	But	Outwards		
Ca'ed	Called	Cam	came	Cauld	Cold
Chiel	Man	Chinge	change	Coggie	Wooden bowl
Coo	Cow	Cood	could	Coordie	cowardly
Cornin	Mealtime	Crannie	small hole	Creeshie	Greasy
Dander	Slow walk	Deid	dead	Didna	Did not
Dune	Done	Doon	Down		
E'e	Eye	Eneuch	enough	Ettle	Intend
Exhuse	Excuse				
Faund	Found	Fell	keen	Fell	Severe
Fell	Strong	Fell	Large		
Gaen	Gone	Gang	go	Gaun	Going
Gied	Given	Girnie	grumbling	Green	Wish for
Hae	Have	Hale	healthy	Haun	Hand
Hefty	Big	Heid	head	Hinmost	Last
Hoo	How				
Ilka	Each	Intae	into	Ither	Other
Jist	Just				
Hen	knowledge	Keeked	Peeped	Kye	cattle
Lang	long	Lanky	Tall	Lassock	Young woman
Lood	loud	Loof	Palm	Loon	Young lad

Lown	quiet	Lousin	Stopping time		
Mair	More	Maitter	Matter	Mainners	Manners
Maun	must	Mirk	Dark	Mune	Moon
Nabbed	caught	Nicht	Night	Niver	Never
Noo	Now				
Ordnar	ordinary	Oor	our	Oor	Hour
Pented	painted	Ploy	games	Pouthered	Powdered
Puir	Poor				
Quate	Quiet				
Rax	reach	Rowth	Plenty		
Sae	so	Schule	school	Scooted	Rushed
Seck	dismissal	Shairly	surely	shule	Shovel
Shoogly	loose	Simmer	summer	Smiddy	Smith
Soople	supple	Sorted	Put right	Speil	Climb
Spier	ask	Spune	Spoon	Staucher	Stagger
Stoor	dust	Stracht	straight	Stravagin	Wandering
Tap	top	Thoght	thought	Thole	Suffer
Thrang	busy	Tousy	untidy	Tow	Turn of cage
Wa	wall	Wad	would	Wannert	Wandered
Wandered	lost				
Yersel	Yourself				