The Dundee Coal Company Emphasis on the Closing Years  
(1950 – 1962)  

By  

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THE DUNDEE COAL COMPANY
EMPHASIS ON THE CLOSING YEARS
(1950-1962)

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) in the DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, in the Faculty of Arts, at the University of Durban-Westville.

Supervisor: Professor S Bhana
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Dedicated with gratitude
to my Mother and sisters,
not forgetting my late
Father, Mr N.S. Pillay
whose inspiration lives on.
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SUMMARY

It was Peter Smith's discovery of coal in present day Dundee which led to the establishment of the Coal Industry in Natal. As a result of this discovery the township of Dundee was laid out and the Dundee Coal Company was founded around 1882. This was one of the largest coal companies in the early 1900's and had assumed control over the St. George's Company, the Burnside Collieries and had erected its own By-Products Plant in Waschbank.

The St. George's Company did not prove to be an economically viable proposition in the 1920's and was consequently closed down. The Burnside Collieries had then become the lifeblood of the Dundee Coal Company. By the 1950's this Colliery was plagued by "gob fires" and this was to lead to the decline of the Company. In 1955 the Burnside Colliery had come to the end of its tether. This was then the end of coal mining in Dundee.

Nevertheless the Dundee Coal Company continued to exist into the early 1960's with the By Products Plant in Waschbank, which had assumed a relatively subsidiary role when the Burnside Colliery was in full operation, assuming much significance and becoming the only financial source of the Company.

However, this thesis concentrates primarily on "coal mining" up to 1955 and elaborates briefly upon the By Products Plant of the Company thereafter, up to 1960.
INTRODUCTION

In South Africa coal measures range from Natal through the eastern, northern, central and western Transvaal into the Orange Free State and Cape Province. Thus there is coal under vast areas of South African soil. Today coal is mined in three of the four provinces of the Republic and the mining of coal has developed over the years into a vigorous industry. "It has grown side by side with the gold and other mineral industries. Yet in comparison to gold, diamonds and other glamour minerals like platinum or chromite, we hear very little about it."¹ Abundant supplies have indeed made easier the growth of South Africa's vast mining industry and the secondary industries which followed in its wake. Coal helped the rapid development of the country's rail transport system and may well be said to have (progressed) powered the revolution which changed the country from a comparatively poor pastoral territory into the most advanced industrial state on the African continent.

In addition to all this South African coal is becoming increasingly important as a raw material in metallurgical and chemical industries which have mushroomed all over the country. "Main users of South Africa's coal are power stations which generate the world's cheapest electricity from low priced coals of the country. Industry is the second largest consumer, followed by the South African Railways. The balance goes to South Africa's mines, to coke manufacturers, to domestic users, for bunkers and for export."² Coal is therefore of fundamental importance to us.

South African coal was not only consumed nationally but was also shipped as far afield as Japan and Europe. The reason for this demand seems to be mainly that the nuclear power station programmes of advanced countries have fallen seriously behind schedule and there has been an unexpected shortfall of coal production in other parts of the world.

"Today South Africa possesses 80% of the whole of Africa's coal resources and produces 91% of the total output on the continent." 3

"There is no doubt therefore, that among our mineral resources coal is something of a Cinderella, and is commonly overlooked in favour of more glamorous minerals." 4

"From all this it will be clear that, in addition to providing more than 80% of the power used in this country coal is the source of a very large number of products in everyday use which we could scarcely do without." 5 We would do well therefore to be thankful that we have coal in abundance, and a thriving coal mining industry in the bargain.

Many townships throughout South Africa that have sprouted and burgeoned, owe their existence, growth and development to the discovery of coal. Dundee in Northern Natal is no exception. "It was the joint activity of two farms which ensured that, by 1879 Dundee had become a recognized dot on the map and the Anglo Zulu

conflict of that year ensured it would remain so. The presence of large imperial forces, marshalled in the vicinity for Lords Chelmsford's second invasion of the Zulu kingdom, provided local mining enterprise with its first readily accessible market during the winter of that year, while a further bonus materialized in the form of transport riders dragooned into carrying commissariat stones up from the fort and Pietermaritzburg; these riders were only too willing to load otherwise empty wagons with readily disposable coal for the return journey.  

"During 1882 the economic potential of the region inspired the laying out of no less than three townships, one by David Draper and his property Lennoxton, another by G.M. Sutton on the farm Coalfield and the third by Peter Smith on the coal-rich Dundee. The first of these was too close to the established administrative centre at Newcastle to develop an independent urban identity and, in the ensuing rivalry for recognition between the other two, it was Dundee which emerged as the colony's coal capital."

As early as 1884, W.H. Beaumont, resident magistrate in Newcastle was able to report that, "the townships of Dundee have been developing at a great rate and bid fair to form the centre of a district which, from its situation, its climate, and its great natural wealth and resources, is destined ere long to become one of considerable importance."  

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDING OF THE DUNDEE COAL COMPANY

"When Peter Smith with his wife Ann and three children set sail from Britain in October, 1859, in the Lady of the Lake, bound for Port Natal, little could he have imagined that the decision to leave his home country would result in his pioneering the coal mining industry in Natal and the establishment of the town of Dundee in February 1864, now populated by more than 11 000 people a full century later."¹

Peter Smith did not go straight to present day Dundee on his arrival at Durban late in December 1859, after a voyage of three months from Scotland. Instead he leased a farm in the Ladysmith district; but his experience and method of the farming in Scotland resulted in disaster when put into practice in South Africa. His brother Thomas, a bachelor who had preceded him to this country and had been granted a farm of 3 000 acres which he named Dundee Farm, persuaded Peter to join him. This Peter did, purchasing half the farm, as Thomas concentrated on building. "Peter Smith and his family arrived at the Dundee Farm (now generally known as Talana Hill) in February 1864."²

Shortly after Peter Smith's arrival at the Dundee Farm, he discovered coal about 500 metres from his homestead, near the Steenkool Spruit and began mining the outcrop there. With true Scottish tenacity and

². See Appendix A.
determination he sunk the first shaft near the river at the bottom of present day Ann Street. Initially he used very primitive methods, according to a record compiled by Peter's grandson, the late Mr Hamish Smith, "the headgear of the shaft consisted of a single pulley fixed in the fork of a stout gum tree, the traction being two oxen which pulled the coal up. It was reversed to lower the drum. These animals became so adept that if the attendants did not empty the drum expeditiously, their reverse action came into motion and the loaded drum went down the shaft again."³

Meanwhile in 1878, the Natal Department of mines called in Mr Frederick W. North, Colonial Mining Engineer, Dudley and London, to report on the Coalfields of Klip River, Weenen, Umvoti and Victoria Counties. This report was published in 1881. At Dundee, North took samples of coal from which Peter Smith was working and of him and his coal mine Mr North stated, "Mr Smith seems to have been one of the first to develop the coal deposits of the colony and began to work it on his farm as early as 1865. Even then he appears to have recognized the value of this fuel, and during the whole period that has since elapsed he has continually worked it."⁴

In 1880, Peter Smith sent two samples of coal for Smithy and household purposes to the London Exhibition and received a silver medal and a diploma. This was an early indication that Dundee coal was of far superior quality.

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"The total thickness of the coal in Peter Smith's seams was 6 feet, 3 inches. The specific gravity of three samples taken by Mr North was 1.414, 1.357 and 1.354 respectively. It was of bituminous quality, burning freely with a long flame, leaving a dark grey ash, and making a fairly good coke.\textsuperscript{5} Without sufficient demand for the output, however, it was impossible for Peter Smith to make any great profit, and with the means of communication for such heavy produce, it was impossible to make any great development of the mine. "The usual output during the time of the year when transport riders could travel through the veldt was about thirty loads of 50 cwt. each per month, probably the whole quantity excavated by Peter Smith during the first fifteen years of mining operations was not more than 700 tons.\textsuperscript{6} Over the years, however, coal had become better known, and its value for steam, Smith and household purposes were more appreciated, as a result the production for the year 1881 alone, was more than 750 tons.

Peter Smith's mine really began enjoying a boom from March 1879 when the British Army made the valley their headquarters for the Second Invasion of Zululand. This encouraged Peter Smith to enlarge his interests. Consequently in 1882, he brought out from Scotland a fellow Dundonian, McConnachie, to develop further coal deposits. This mining engineer, together with the services of Cornish miners, was to transform the industry. "Gradually the expansion of operations brought a small community together in the Steenkoolstroom valley and a tiny hamlet of wattle and daub thatched cottages or wood and iron

\textsuperscript{5} The Daily News, 27 February 1964.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 27 February 1964.
prefabs, scattered near the stream, was the beginning of the modern town." 7

By the 1880's Peter Smith was despatching wagons loaded with black gold to Pietermaritzburg's Market Square. So successful was the venture that it led to the construction of the railway from Durban, a lifeline that reached Ladysmith in 1886 and was later extended to the Colonial border. Historian Basil Leverton points out that, "transporting coal by wagon load had become a costly venture, in fact Natal coal could not compete with coal brought by ship from Wales." 8 This was true for although, "coal was very economically worked and never exceeded 10 shillings per ton at the pits mouth, the average cost of delivery to Pietermaritzburg by oxwagon was £3. 10 shillings per ton." 9 The railway bisecting Natal altered this. Dundee and Newcastle coal could be taken to the coast for local use as well as bunkering at a relatively cheaper rate. Coal deposits elsewhere in Northern Natal were also being exploited and soon a railway line was snaking across the countryside from Glencoe to Dundee and on to Vryheid.

The date of the founding of the Dundee Coal Company is as yet uncertain. "It was in existence prior to 1886, at which time it was negotiating with Natal Government Railways for a reduction in rates between Ladysmith and Durban. It already had a railways contract and was

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negotiating other contracts with steamship companies."\(^{10}\) McConnachie continued in the employment of Smith until 1889 when the Dundee Coal Company started mining on a big scale. He then became the Company's first miner. "By 1902 the interests of the Dundee Coal Company were expanding, and under its first and second Chairman, Sir Benjamin Greenacre and Mr Otto Siedle,\(^{11}\) it brought great wealth to the community and the town could boast most modern amenities. Whatever the affluence of the town and the Company he had created, Peter Smith remained essentially a humble and forthright man. Well loved with many good friends, hospitable and kindly. Peter and his wife continued to live in the same unpretentious home where they had begun.

It is interesting to note that, had it not been for Peter Smith's mine the township of Dundee (capital of Northern Natal) would not have been founded; for it was in 1882, that due to the tremendous progress of coal mining, the idea of laying out a township had been entertained. "Peter Smith assisted by his son William Craighead, his son-in-law Dugald Macphail and Charles George Willson considered plans and a portion of the Dundee Farm was surveyed and laid off in the erven:"\(^{12}\) later to be proclaimed as "Dundee" a private township. "These four men are known as the founders of Dundee."\(^{13}\) From the founding of the town in 1882, rapid progress has been made. Today Dundee which was granted borough status in 1902, is an important and thriving centre.

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11. See Appendix B.
13. See Appendix C.
Behind all this was the decision of Peter Smith to leave his home country for pastures new. "If anyone could have laid claim to the title Old King Coal, it was Peter Smith, founder of Dundee in the heart of Northern Natal's coalfields, and the pioneer of coalmining in South Africa."\textsuperscript{14} "The grand old pioneer died on July 21, 1911 at the ripe old age of 83 years, being predeceased by his wife Ann in August 1908,"\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} The Daily News, 8 June 1966.
\textsuperscript{15} See Appendix D.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER TWO

THE DUNDEE COAL COMPANY

The Dundee Coal Company, originally known as the Talana Mine when mining rights on Peter Smith's farm (Talana Hill) had been sold to the Company, was a pre-eminent, huge Company having various branches. The Company had assumed control over mines in Burnside, as well as the St. George's Company in Hatingspruit and had erected its own By Products plant in Waschbank.

The Talana Mine itself, however, ceased "coal getting on the 9th April 1912; since when all underground labour had been transferred to Burnside together with as many surface boys as were required."¹ All the materials such as rails, sleepers, timbers and machinery were to be used at the Burnside mines as well. Although there was yet at Talana a number of surface boys who were engaged with one European miner getting out materials underground and other necessary work on surface, "the Talana Mine was officially closed by the end of April 1912."²

Maximum attention was then concentrated on the Burnside and St. George's mines which fell under the co-ordinating control of the Dundee Coal Company. St. George's Company at Hatingspruit was a small and successful Company, which had forged a good working relationship with

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1. Natal Archives, Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/16, p. 218.
2. See Appendix E.
the Dundee Coal Company. On 29 October 1912, the Chairman of the Dundee Coal Company Mr W Greenacre, at the 14th Annual Meeting in Durban reported that, "the past year has been an eventful period in the history of the Company, for the Director found it necessary to close down all the workings at the old Dundee Mine and concentrate their energies on the Burnside Pit, which under the capable management of Mr Ben Sokehill, has yielded such excellent measures. If you are continually winning coal, you are at the same time reducing your assets and the time must come when a vanishing point is reached. I desire to place on record our appreciation of the cordial relations that exist between the Dundee (Coal Company) and St. George's Companies which have worked together so amicably and with such mutual satisfaction for so many years. The tendency of the age is distinctly in favour of amalgamation, for it is contended and I think rightly, that amalgamations favour cheaper working and reduction in administration costs and expenses." 3

By December 1913, a year later, it was reported that under the date of 5 June, "the mines department of the government had given official permission for Ben Sokehill to assume the management of both Burnside and St. George's Companies; and that the Mines Department had agreed to publish the outputs of the Burnside and of the St. George's mines in one total as the output of the Dundee Coal Company." 4 St. George's was a lucrative mine roughly producing 150 000 tons of coal per year, or about 13 000 tons per month; whereas Burnside produced roughly 200 000 tons per year, or about 18 000 tons per month." 5 However,

5. Ibid, 1/1/1/6, p. 59.
by April 1925, "St. Georges was only making a profit of £96.11.4 and so was not considered an economically viable proposition."  

At the Shareholders Annual General Meeting held on 11 March 1925 W Greenacre reported, "you will have noticed from the report that the St. George's Mine is definitely closing down. This property has been of very great value to the Company, and it will be a cause for regret especially to the shareholders of the original St. George's Company, that it can no longer be considered a revenue producer. For many months this step has been contemplated, but up to the present it has been a remunerative proposition, and now we can safely assure shareholders that all payable coal has been extracted. This property stands in the books of the Company at the very low figure of £10.712. The Directors anticipate that on the property being realized, little or no loss will be sustained."  

Mine Stores Ltd (Natal) purchased the farms with all buildings thereon, comprising the St. George's Property for £3 000. Mr George Orr resigned as General Manager on 22 April 1925 and was subsequently appointed Manager of Tendega Collieries.

By 1925 therefore, Burnside was the only viable proposition, still producing around 240 000 tons of coal per annum, this was the only mine associated with the Dundee Coal Company and could indeed be

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6. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company (Natal Archives), 1/1/1/9, p. 54.
7. See Appendix F.
8. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/9, p. 31.
regarded as the lifeblood of the Company. This mine at Burnside also led to the establishment of the township of Burnside. This township was in some respects quite unique. It was governed by a dictator, but not of a belligerant type. There was a population in the dorp of approximately 2 000 souls, including Europeans, Indians and Natives, but not a solitary policeman or civic official was required to keep the peace or minister to the people's wants. The reason for this was that Burnside was controlled by a benevolent autocrat whose interests were those of the people, as theirs were his. He was the manager of the Dundee Coal Company's mines, which employ more than 1 100 men. Mr Ben Sokehill served in the capacity as the manager of the Burnside Mine.

"Were it not for the elevated railway which spans the Burnside valley, carrying a seemingly endless procession of heavily-laden trucks from the tunnels in the hillside, as well as the smooth coal dump in the middle distance, the casual visitor would hardly recognize Burnside as a mining town. In the background encircling more than half the town, is a range of Berea like hills, on a section of which the European population resides. In another area below, is the well laid out Native encampment and at the foot of the hills are stores." Two miles inside the tunnels that pierce the hills a small army of workmen are engaged hewing coal out of the ground.

Burnside then was the keystone of the Dundee Coal Company's activities. "Bought from Mr Conrad Marais for a figure of £628, it proved to be

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one of the most valuable buys of the Company." Initially taken up
as a farm and only later converted to a mine after much prospecting,
and only after showing great coal producing potential.

At a time when several collieries were forced to close through
inexperience, mismanagement and under capitalization, the Burnside
mine was a thriving hive of activity, greatly increasing its output
as will be seen, and importing massive, sophisticated and costly
equipment from abroad. It was also greatly concerned with the safety
of its employees and therefore ensured that all mining safety
regulations were strictly enforced.

(i) THE PROMULGATION OF SAFETY REGULATIONS

"The black miners shared with the white and Indian miners the common
hazard of death or injury by mining accident. In his retrospective
report on the progress of the Natal Coal industry up to the end of
1909, the Commissioner of Mines felt obliged to observe that accident
rates had not been improved like other features of the industry,
having fluctuated from year to year without demonstrating any marked
tendency to increase or decrease progressively." 11

As early as 1899, "What was subsequently recognized to have been a
very brief and inadequate code of safety measures was published in an

10 Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/3,
(Natal Archives), p. 388.
11 D.R. Edgecombe and W.R. Guest: "An Introduction to the Pre Union
effort to minimize the accidents usually attendant upon the development of a coal mining industry;"12 later, however, a more comprehensive set of safety regulations came into force, subsequently amended and adjusted with particular attention given to such aspects as the use and storage of explosives, the use of safety lamps, and the responsibilities of mine management.

Colliery accidents in Natal were not always identified as being symptomatic solely of a deficiency in management. "Early on it was suggested that the accident rate could not be reckoned as being out of proportion to the total number of men employed when the irresponsible disposition of the Native is taken into consideration."13 While the inexperience and transitory nature of the black labour force was always recognized as a significant factor, the Mines Department was increasingly inclined to blame mine managers for their failure to provide adequate supervision and to ensure strict observance of the safety regulations." It was pointed out that numerous accidents, especially explosions had an adverse effect on the supply of black labour and that more careful attention to safety measures, even if it involved greater outlay on material and supervision would be more than repaid by a better labour supply and consequent lower cost of production. The prosecutions officially instituted for breaches of the mining regulations were almost all against mine managers and white miners, because they were held responsible for most of the offences discovered by inspections

12. Ibid.,
and also, as the Commissioner of mines recognized, because mine managers were reluctant to prosecute their own workmen under the regulations for fear of reducing their labour force by acquiring a bad reputation among the natives." 14

The mining safety regulations that were promulgated during the latter 1900's contained such drastic conditions that some of the mines could not continue to exist unless some measure of relief was obtained. An understanding of some of these regulations is important for it throws much light on the mechanics and functioning of the mines.

The important regulations, among others, were as follows:

(i) Each mine shall be equipped with appliances such as portable fire extinguishers, for dealing with fires. Such appliances shall be kept in good order and at places approved by the inspector.

(ii) Spare emergency appliances sufficient to allow for the escape of persons in the mine in case of damage to the ordinary appliances shall be kept ready.

(iii) No lamp or light other than a locked safety lamp shall be allowed in any mine in which inflammable gas has been found within the preceding six months.

(iv) In addition to such examination on the surface the ganger shall examine each lamp before it is allowed to pass into the working place in his section.

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(v) No person shall move in any un-illuminated part of a mine, without a light, except in the case of emergency.

(vi) No shot shall be fired in a colliery from which inflammable gas is being given off.

(vii) No person without adequate mining experience shall be permitted to work underground. As far as is reasonably practicable, inexperienced persons shall be placed under the care of experienced persons.

(viii) At least once in every shift, while men are at work, each working place shall be visited by an official who shall see that safety is assured in every respect. The visiting official must be either:

(a) Manager
(b) Undermanager
(c) Holder of a first or second class mine manager's certificate.
(d) Competent person who has at least five years of practical underground experience.

(ix) Quantity of air in respective splits or currents shall at least once in every month, be measured and entered. A plan showing ventilation of every colliery shall be kept in the office at the mine and shall show air currents, air crossings, brattices, etc.

(x) "A mine manager shall not sign a blasting certificate until he has found the applicant has a competent knowledge of blasting operations, and at least one year's practical underground experience in mines."

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15. See Appendix G.
(xi) No shot shall be fired in or within a distance of twenty yards, from any place in which there is sufficient inflammable gas.

(xii) A station shall be appointed at the entrance to the mine, and the following provisions shall have effect as to inspection before commencing work. A competent person shall inspect every part of the mine situate beyond the station in which workmen are to pass during the shift, and shall ascertain the condition thereof so far as the presence of gas, ventilation and general safety are concerned.

(xiii) No workman shall pass beyond any such station until the part of the mine beyond that station has been examined and stated by such persons to be safe.

(xiv) A report specifying where noxious or inflammable gas was found present and what defects and other sources of danger shall be reported without delay.

(xv) The manager shall see that the number of unskilled labourers employed underground under the care of one ganger, shall not exceed fifty.

(xvi) In collieries in which safety lamps are required, drilling or coal cutting or coal cutting on the coal face shall not be started after the coal has been broken down by blasting, until the coal so broken down has been completely removed from the working place.

(xvii) Should a fire break out in the mine, all persons except those employed in dealing with fire and in services in connection therewith, shall be withdrawn from the whole of the underground position of the mine.
(xviii) Working places in collieries must be cleaned each day.

(xix) No person shall be appointed as onsetter unless he is
a competent person of European descent.

(xx) Electricity shall not be used as a motive power under
the control of coloured persons in any mine in which
the use of safety lamps is required."

With such stringent measures it is no small wonder that a number of
small mines were forced into closing largely because of their inability
to satisfy the requirements of the Natal Coal Owners' Society. The
Dundee Coal Company, however, successfully met these regulations and
implemented necessary changes. These regulations were introduced with
the ultimate purpose of reducing the death rates and equipping the
mines with modern safety equipment.

In an endeavour to reduce the high accident rate on the mines the Natal
Coal Owners' Society had organized various schemes in order to create
an awareness among the various collieries of safety precautions. Such
meetings were held at the Central Mine Rescue Training Station at
Dundee. At these meetings new apparatus were introduced such as proto-
breathing apparatus, novo revivers, oxygen pumps and Edison cap
lamps. "Safety prize schemes" were also drawn up, based on the lowest
fatality rate for the year of competition. The underground fatality
rate was to be issued annually by each mine. "There were two classes
according to this scheme:

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16. Meetings of the Committee of Natal Coal Owners' Society, (Talana
Class A where the total average underground labour in service exceeds 900.

Class B, where the total average underground labour in service does not exceed 900."

Safety prizes were to be presented to the winning collieries for outstanding fatality rates. Shields were offered as safety prizes and framed certificates were presented to the winning colliery. Individual prizes were awarded as well, mementoes for officials and workers of winning collieries, examples are silver cigarette cases, beer mugs and belts.

However, it is interesting to note that the records of the Dundee Coal Company do not reflect having been awarded a safety prize, especially during the years 1950–1962, neither do the records make mention of serious accidents or fatalities during this period. "During the 1950's the Dundee Coal Company, having an average of 1936 in its labour force, had shown an accident rate of 57.33 per 1 000 per annum." These were not fatal accidents, however. It does seem that the safety schemes and safety regulations did therefore influence the injury and accident rate on this mine; for the Company had attempted to create a consciousness for safety by means of safety posters, cinema films on safety propaganda; gramophone records of safety talks to Natives were used on broadcast systems in the collieries and in the compounds. Safety talks by managers and Compound managers enlightening the employees and describing the campaign to prevent accidents, were regular features at the mines.

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Furthermore all miners were required to obtain First Aid Certificates and artisan apprentices and learner miners were also required to obtain First Aid Certificates as a condition of employment. As a result training sessions were organized and referred to as "initial training" and "quarterly training programmes." This indicates that the Dundee Coal Company did make genuine efforts to reduce the accident and injury rates; it made every effort to safeguard its labour force.

(ii) LABOUR

One of the most important factors in the successful working of any undertaking involving manual labour is an abundant supply of cheap and effective operatives in the locality. No work is more dependent upon this than a colliery. The labour force for such work should be plentiful, and its labourers should be drawn from the class that know the necessity and, consequently, feel a desire to work continuously and methodically, so that in the course of time, as a result of practice and experience, the raw and untrained recruit would become a skilled collier, able to hew coal to advantage and secure his working place so that accidents either fatal or otherwise, may be reduced to a minimum.

It is folly to suppose that any agricultural labourer in the colonies of South Africa, either white or black, can with a few months practice become an efficient hand, competent to either take care of himself or get out the coal with economy, both as to gross quantity per diem, and as to the produce being as much as possible large coals instead of small or slack. This experience is only gained by continuous working in a mine. F.W. North reported, "I am firmly convinced that
no labourer is more capable of acquiring this knowledge by training and practice than the kaffir and particularly the Zulu branch of that race, there has been some doubt upon my mind whether extensive works could be carried on by their aid alone, because as is well known the practice of the kaffir is to hire himself for a short period only, during which he will earn sufficient cash to make a special purchase and thereafter retire for an indefinite period to the ease and luxuries of kraal life."\(^19\) Therefore, "although they are a most hardy and populous race and from their courage and intelligence admirably accepted for becoming trained colliers, there is some doubt whether they will apply for employment in sufficient numbers at the collieries, and if, they do, it is doubtful whether more than a small percentage of them will stay at work a sufficient length of time to be properly educated in the dangerous occupation of coal mining."\(^20\)

As a result the Dundee Coal Company was obliged to fall back on Indian labour to meet their requirements. According to the 1898 Commission's report, "Indian miners lack the hardihood and stamina which mining work demands, and which the Natal, Zulu, and East Coast Native possesses in so eminent a degree."\(^21\) It also claimed that

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an average of 12½ to 15% of the Indian miners were regularly on the sick list and that the work they can accomplish in a given time bears an unfavourable proportion to that done by an equal number of natives. Nevertheless the Commission did report that, "Indians are replacing Natives, as their service under indenture removes the uncertainty as to labour supply attendant upon the employment of short service Natives. It does not appear that there is much difference in the efficiency of Natives and Indians for underground work. The ordinary Native is more useful than the Indentured Indian as he arrives in the colony, but the later after a year or so, the latter becomes more efficient."

In the early years the Dundee Coal Company had more Indian than Native employees and the industry as a whole would probably have come to rely more heavily on their services had it not been for the "uncertainty concerning the future of indentured immigration (terminated in 1911), the unpopularity of mine work among indentured Indians and the legal necessity of acquiring their consent to be put to work on the mines."23

The average labour in service for the years 1950, 1951, and 1952 according to the Natal Coal Owners' Society is as follows:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>WHITES</th>
<th>INDIANS</th>
<th>AFRICANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>15,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>15,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>16,104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures were only available up to 1952, nevertheless what this leads one to surmise is that, although in the early 1900's Indian labour was preferred, towards the latter half of the 1900's a definite preference for natives was clear. "The problem of migratory labour was not acute on the coal mines during the latter 1900's, reports the Financial Mail, "for the ideal coal mine recruit as far as the government is concerned is an unmarried African from a neighbouring territory who can be sent home at regular intervals to return on new contracts. This way he cannot put down roots." 25 This policy was followed closely by the Dundee Coal Company from 1950 onwards, and this is clearly reflected in the labour position of the Burnside Mine; "of the 1331 employed, 606 were Indians and 725 were Natives, this was in 1918." 26 By 1951, however, of the 1 100 employed only 141 were Indians. By 1953 the Company's policy was not to encourage the employment of Indians at Burnside. This is significant for in 1900 the Company had indent ed for a 1 000 Indians, whereas by 1953 only 141 Indians were in its employ.

24. Meetings of the Committee of the Natal Coal Owners' Society, 26/10/51, p. 223
Nevertheless the Company did encounter many problems in recruiting Native labour. "In 1952 the Natal Mine Managers' Association had accepted 7110 recruits, of this figure 1 240 recruits or 17.44% deserted, most of the desertions occurring within the first six days of their arrival."27 These desertions were mainly due to the recruits being forwarded, without the nature of the work they have to do, being fully and accurately explained to them. Recruiters, however, (explained) maintained that the poor reception which recruits received upon arrival was one of the major causes of desertions. It was then decided that meals be provided and billy cans be issued so that the boys could have utensils; care was to be taken to place boys on the type of work they could do best or already knew.

By 1953 the Recruiting Commission had established central depots for reception of all recruits. At these depots the recruits were housed, fed, medically treated where necessary, dereminised, given physical culture exercises, lectured on safety matters and every effort made to fit them for work on the Gold Mines before being actually sent there. It was hoped that the Natal Coal Owners' Native Labour Association (NCONLA) would establish such central depots, but until this was done it was necessary for individual collieries receiving recruits direct from the Recruiters to perform some of the central depot functions themselves.

The muscular soreness which arose from unaccustomed hard physical work was recognized as an important factor in the early desertions. The new recruits did not know that the soreness was of a temporary nature and would completely disappear after a few days if the physical exertion was continued. An acclimatization period on relatively light work, during which the Natives' physical condition was to be built up, was to be of value in reducing this feature and its effects on desertions.

"The NCONLA, however, made the following recommendations:

All new recruits shall be kept on the surface for not less than six days after their arrival at the collieries. During these six days recruits shall be given light work, receive instruction in safety and health matters and some training in the work they are to perform at the end of the period. This rule was to apply to all new recruits."^28 The Dundee Coal Company followed the recommendations of the NCONLA, and thereafter no mention was made of desertions, probably because the Company's mines had ceased to exist two years after the implementation of these recommendations.

(iii) ACCOMMODATION

Expenditure on housing for black and Indian labourers was kept to a minimum, though the accommodation and rations provided by the collieries was generally better than that offered in the agricultural sector. "The district surgeon at Dundee suggested that the wood
and iron structures, usually provided to house black and Indian mine labour were quite unsuitable, in a climate subject to such rapid changes of atmosphere and should be replaced with brick buildings equipped with suitable ventilation and proper fireplaces to obviate the prevailing use of open-grate fires which were causing a great deal of sickness through the inhalation of fumes. The district surgeon proposed the erection of brick or stone dwellings in place of the traditional corrugated iron buildings, with proper roofing and flooring, ventilation and chimneys, as well as separate ablution facilities for blacks and Indians and adequate hospital accommodation for invalids and accident victims. This was in 1903, however, by the early 1950's, Indian and black labourers had no grievances as far as housing and accommodation was concerned, for the Dundee Coal Company ensured that neat, little brick houses were erected for Indians in Burnside and the barracks accommodation for blacks was greatly improved to the satisfaction of the district surgeon at Dundee. Furthermore the Indians were provided with allotments of land to enable them to cultivate fruit and vegetables, and prizes were also offered for the best cultivated allotment.

The Dundee Coal Company provided rations for all labourers; free Indian women and children were also provided with half rations. Although the records of the Dundee Coal Company do not provide a breakdown of the rations, other mines in northern Natal issued

the following rations: 1¼ lbs of vegetable, obtained from nearby farms, once a week. 2½ lbs of raw meat in two issues a week. They had to cook this themselves. In addition there was a weekly issue of 15 lbs of mealie meal. Workers were also provided with coffee before going underground to work. Rations of the Dundee Coal Company could not have been very much different.

Burnside turned out to be a well maintained and neat township governed by the manager of the mine, Mr Caister. The Dundee Coal Company assisted in building Indian and Native schools for their labourers" children, "largely because it was felt that 65% of the children from these schools later entered the services of the Company."30 The Company had also built a hospital, a little distance away from the mine. This hospital helped to ensure that an efficient and plentiful supply of labour was at hand by assisting to cure ill employees.

(iv) WAGES

An outstanding feature of the Dundee Coal Company during the period 1950-1962 is the absence of strikes. This therefore leads one to assume that the salaries of the Indians and Native employees were indeed abreast of inflation, or that the Dundee Coal Company was

30. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, (Natal Archives), 1/1/17, p. 49.
quick in acceding to the demands of the labourers for an increase. On viewing this period, the later assumption holds true; for as early as 1950, the manager reported that, "he was experiencing trouble with his labour due to the fact that very much higher wages were being paid in the surrounding districts and particularly by the Vryheid Coronation Limited, who were paying their coke loaders 3/4d per shift as compared with their 2/6 per shift." The Managing Director explained that, "the By Products Works relied almost entirely on voluntary labour, thereby affecting a considerable saving in recruiting expenses; in order to satisfy his boys and at the same time maintain a full complement, an increase of 3d per shift was provided."

In 1950, the Managing Director reported that the Natal Coal Owners' Society, on the recommendations of the Mine Managers' Association, had agreed to raise the minimum wage of underground Nature Workers from 2/3d to 2/5d. per shift with effect from 1 May 1950. The increase was considered necessary from a recruiting point of view, in order to bring the minimum wage in Natal into line with that of the Transvaal.

By the end of 1950, however, the Dundee Coal Company decided to adopt the proposals recommended by the Natal Coal Owners' Society (NCOS) in respect of applying the increase of 15% on basic salaries granted to daily paid employees, to monthly officials at the mines and By Products Works, also the Head Office staff.
In January 1951, the Natives having ascertained that the wages had been increased at the mines, were also demanding an increase. "It was finally decided that in order to avoid labour troubles, it was advisable to extend the increase of 2d per shift."  

In 1952 Native labourers at the By Products requested an increase in wages largely because higher wages were being paid by other industrial establishments in the district. "In order to satisfy the boys and appease the situation the manager had suggested an increase of one penny to three pence per shift."  

"In 1952 the daily paid employees requested:

(i) Admission to the NCOS providend fund.

(ii) Holiday bonuses to be increased from £12. 10. 0d. to £27. 10. 0d., to bring them in line with payments made to the mine employees."  

These privileges were readily agreed upon by the managers.

"By 1959 increases ranging from 3d to 6d per day were granted to the By Products (labour) employees, largely because wages here were much lower than wages paid by other neighbouring industries. This increase cost the Company £87 per month."  

33. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/16, p. 69.
34. Ibid., p. 190.
35. Ibid., p. 206.
36. Ibid., 1/1/17, p. 228.
Long service Indians had approached the Managing Director on several occasions, for some indication as to the form of gratuity they would receive on retirement. After a discussion it was pointed out that Indians and Natives could qualify for a government old age pension and it was therefore resolved that, "at the pleasure of the Board, all non-European employees, who retired by reasons of old age or infirmity from pursuing a normal gainful occupation be granted a gratuity at the rate of 10 shillings (£1.00) for each year of service."  

In 1957 an Indian employee, "Dorasamy Naidoo, discharged from the Company's service due to ill health, after 38 years of service received £38."  

In 1958 another Indian, "B. Kanaye who was unable to continue working due to ill health and who had 29 years of service with the Company was treated on the same basis as those who were retrenched from Burnside. He was therefore paid a lump sum of £22.15.0d."  

In 1960 a Native employee, "Joseph Mseleku (Duma) who had 20½ years service as a compound clerk, was forced to retire due to ill health. He received the sum of £20.0.0d."  

The records of the Dundee Coal Company do not offer a clear cut salary distinction between Whites, Indians and Natives, neither do they forward us clearly with the exact salaries earned by the Indians or Natives. It does state, however, "that in 1953 for example the

37. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/17, p. 277.
38. Ibid., 1/1/1/18, p. 173.
39. Ibid., p. 162.
40. Ibid., p. 239.
Indians were earning £29 a month, while the Natives were earning 7 shillings a day or approximately £16 a month." Nevertheless what is highlighted in the foregoing section on wages is clearly indicative of the fact that whenever wage disputes did arise, the Company was very eager to accede to the demands of the labourers so as to ensure the workers were satisfied and a full complement of labour was maintained. As a result the Dundee Coal Company boasted a clean sheet as far as strikes were concerned for period 1950–1962.

(v) EXPORTS

The Dundee Coal Company which was pre-eminent during the latter 1800's and early 1900's by contributing about two-thirds of the colony's total output, had slipped to fourth position in the output stakes towards the latter 1900's, being outstripped by the Hlobane Colliery, Vryheid Coronation and the Durban Navigation Colliery. It is surprising therefore, that by 1950, this comparatively small Company was still exporting thousands of tons of coal to the distant areas of the world.

In January 1950 enquiries for coal to Pakistan and Adelaide were made and negotiations in regard to supply 150 000 tons of coal to the Argentine Railways were under way. Owing to the shortage of tonnage it was feared that unless additional business was forthcoming, there would be a large excess of coal available in the second half of January. "In February of 1950, however, the problem was eased when an offer had been made by the Natal Coal Owners' Association to

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41. Minutes of the Meetings of the Natal Coal Owners' Society, (Talana Museum), p. 441.
supply 200,000 to 250,000 tons of Natal Coal to Pakistan to commence on March depending on the availability of freight."\(^{42}\)

"During 1950 there were numerous complaints from buyers in Port Sudan, Aden, Hongkong, Singapore and Massacra particularly concerning the size and quality of the coal. This was most disturbing. In view of the seriousness of the complaints the Natal Coal Owners' Association had decided to engage Dr P.E. Hall, who was a coal technologist to:

(i) Observe and report on the size and condition of the coal of each colliery on its arrival at the Port for shipment, and in its course through the loading appliances in the process of loading and,

(ii) thereafter proceed to each of the shipment collieries to observe and to report on the screening of Round coal as loaded into trucks at the mines for shipment."\(^{43}\)

This was evidently a successful exercise, for thereafter no complaints were made mention of.

"The Dundee Coal Company had secured freight for the first 120,000 tons of coal to Pakistan. Strenuous efforts were being made to obtain freight for a further similar tonnage for shipment in May 1950; but in this case 60,000 tons were required at Chittagong where the full loaded draft must not exceed 23 feet. Owing to this restriction great difficulty was being experienced in securing freight for this destination."\(^{44}\)

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42. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/17, p. 71.
43. Ibid., p. 75.
44. Ibid., p. 77.
Towards the end of the 1950's the Australian buyers had exercised their option to purchase an additional 50 000 tons of Natal Coal and negotiations were proceeding in regard to a further substantial quantity for this market. Reference was made to the fact that, had it not been for the Australian business practically no export would have left the port during the months of February and March.

Reporting on the shipping position, Mr Siedle, Managing Director, said that, "this time last year the worry was shortage of orders, whereas today it was a question of the number of ships to carry the coal, and indications are that this position is likely to persist for the next three months. Every effort, however, is being made to obtain additional tonnage." 45

There was much truth in what Mr Siedle said. "In January 1952 at a meeting in Johannesburg between representatives of the Coal Owners' Society and the Pakistan Delegation which had come to the Union as Pakistan was in desperate straits for coal had considered that a mission to negotiate with the representatives of the South African government and the Coal Owners might assist their cause. Owing to the difficult question of obtaining freight, Pakistan was prepared, as a long term measure to build her own ships provided the Union guaranteed regular supplies of coal." 46

45. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/17, p. 22.
46. Ibid., p. 174.
By 1953, however, the Dundee Coal Company had embarked on a scheme of crushing coal for the Natal Associated Colliers. Owing to the lack of export business and consequent shortage of "smalls" for power stations, the crushing and sizing of "peas" and "dross" for Natal Associated Colliers was entertained, as there was no other outlet for round coal except to the Railways; it was therefore felt that it might pay the Company later to crush coal than to restrict output. Thus avoiding the repercussions of reducing output.

Export had been considerably delayed in May 1954 owing to Railway transport difficulties, resulting in heavy demurrage charges. "It was also feared that the "S.S. Natal Coast" which was loading would not be completed until the first week in September. The London agents were therefore reluctant to arrange further contracts under these circumstances and with the continued poor truck supply, there was little hope of any improvement."47

(vi) OUTPUT

"The Managing Director estimated that the outputs for the 1951-1955 will be approximately 33 000 to 34 000 tons per month. After which there will be a gradual diminution, due to exhausting supplies, until 1960, when output will have dropped to 19 000 tons."48 It is important at this stage to revert to the 1920's for example when the output for

47. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/17, p. 20.
48. Ibid., p. 90.
the year was 200,000 tons or roughly 18,000 per month. As can be seen, the figure was almost doubled by the 1950’s, and this can largely be attributed to improved technology. The Dundee Coal Company kept abreast with modern technology, for it was indeed one of the first Coal Companies to introduce power drills and coal cutters. “In 1950 the Company had imported sophisticated machinery from West Germany in the form of two “Anderson Boyes Dreadnoughts” cutters at a cost of £4,810 to replace the slow, outdated old Manor S Coulson cutters,”49 assisting to accelerate production and enhance output enormously.

Nevertheless credit must also be given to the Dundee Coal Company for introducing bonus schemes so as to act as incentives, inducing labourers to increase output. However, Dundee was not the first Company to use this scheme, it had been tried by other industries and had proved successful. By December 1950 therefore, to stimulate interest amongst the underground officials and miners with a view to encouraging them to improve production, Mr Caister had submitted proposals for a bonus scheme. The first qualifications before the scheme could operate was as follows:

(i) The output must exceed 35,000 long tons per month.

(ii) The average tons per boy underground must exceed 1.2 long ton per shift.

(iii) The underground cost per ton must not exceed 71.25d. per long ton.

49. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/17,
Subject to the fulfilment of the foregoing conditions, the following rates of bonus were to apply:

Each mine captain £2.10.0d per month.
Each shift boss £2.10.0 per month.
Each mine boy £2.0.0 per month.

In the event of the average being improved from 1.2 to 1.3 long tons per boy, per shift, with no more than at 5% rise in the cost per ton, it was proposed to increase the bonus by £1.10.0 per person for each separate month in which the higher rate obtained."50 This scheme was implemented by the Company. It was indeed an excellent scheme, however, the output production did not warrant the actual implementation of the scheme, for outputs during the subsequent years did not really exceed 35 000 tons.

"On 2 March 1957 a fire broke out on the East Section of the Burnside Mine, as a result of which 3 600 tons of coal were lost in the pillars, there had been no accidents or loss of material and the section had resumed normal work."51 Disaster followed disaster and 11 days later another fire broke out on the West Section of the mine which had been prepared during 1950 and in which coal had just started to be mined.

"This fire had taken 18 hours to seal off, and the loss of coal in the mine pillars affected was estimated at 30 000 tons. As a result of this "gob fire" the inspector of mines had ordered the sections to be abandoned and sealed off. The loss of this section reduced the

50. Minutes of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/17, p. 113.
51. Ibid., p. 136.
daily output by 200 tons. It was estimated that including both top and bottom seam coal, approximately 140 000 tons of mineable coal had been abandoned.\textsuperscript{52} Consequently the manager, by 1952 had expressed grave concern over the outputs of the number one mine. Outputs had deteriorated steadily as a result of increasingly difficult working conditions, and the position following the closing down of three sections was that the manager had been unable to replace the lost output of 200 tons per day. Furthermore due to the excessive dead work necessary in the mine, costs were high and the output had to be maintained at minimum of 27 000 tons for profits to be expected. The Manager stated that, "once the output from number three mine reached reasonable proportions, serious consideration would have to be given to the question of the continued working of number one mine."\textsuperscript{53}

By 1954 the Mines Manager had instituted effective measures for reducing the cost of production at the number one mine. Mining operations were being restricted to the recovery of easily mineable coal, thereby reducing the amount of dead work to a minimum and making possible the retrenchment of personnel. By April 1954 the mine manager had undertaken a personal survey of all labour, both underground and on the surface and had eliminated unnecessary personnel. He had also reduced the amount of non-productive work underground, the labour being transferred to productive employment, and he was pleased to report that section costs had been reduced.

\textsuperscript{52} Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/17, p. 176.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 176.
"By July 1954 two major sections of the number one mine west had been closed down, thus reducing output to synchronise with the supply of trucks." The personnel from these two sections had been transferred to number three mine, which was in position to produce 20 000 tons per month provided sufficient trucks were available. However, "gob fires seemed to be a common phenomena in 1954 and were primarily responsible for terminating the operations in various sections of the mines.

Under these unfortunate circumstances one could not possibly expect the well intended bonus scheme to operate. The Company was not even in a position to produce 25 000 tons of coal per month by 1954.

Outputs therefore were dependent upon demand, and the satisfaction of this demand was dependent upon various factors such as truck supplies, availability of shipping vessels and a constant supply of labour. Labour constituted no problem as was seen, however, the Company had to contend with a continuous shortage of truck supplies. Often vessels were present in port awaiting coal supplies, but the Natal Collieries were unable to receive during the winter months an average supply of trucks of more than 13 500 tons daily. The transport situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the Natal Associated Collieries was compelled to approach the Transport Minister with a view to securing an abundant supply of trucks. This did not assist the Dundee Coal Company for it came to the end of its tether after twelve months.

54. Minutes of the Meetings of the Ind. Co. Com., 17/9/54, p. 18
"There was also a sudden and complete breakdown in South African Railways Transport system, as a result of which there were ships requiring close on to 10 000 tons of bunkers and in addition many vessels were waiting to load cargoes. The Railways were annexing coal despatched for shipment at a rate of 2 400 tons a day, resulting in very little coal arriving at Port and the position could only be described as extremely serious." 55

As far as exports and outputs were concerned the Dundee Coal Company was continuously beset with problems. If sufficient truck supplies were available, there was a shortage of vessels to export the coal. This situation was very critical especially when countries were in dire straits and required the coal urgently. Pakistan had considered building her own vessels as a result of this. This inadequacy of available facilities made it impossible for the Company to meet export and bunker contracts on a regular basis. Furthermore these restrictions on output and export caused costs of production to rise while the reduced export business lowered the pool distribution, the cumulative effect of which was a serious drop in the profit margins of all collieries.

55. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, (Natal Archives), 1/1/1/18, p. 152.
CHAPTER THREE

CLOSING OF THE BURNSIDE MINE

The destructive gob fires of 1953 and 1954 were primarily responsible for accelerating the decline and consequently the closing of the Burnside Mines. "Profits yielded during these years were minimal and the continued functioning of these mines was not considered economically viable."¹ Hence on 6 January 1955 the Managing Director visited the mines and had acquainted the employees with the Board's decision regarding the closing down of the mines. "He was deeply gratified with the manner in which the men had received the news. They were most appreciative of the fact that the Board had seen fit to send its representatives from Durban to the mine to advise them of the position before it was made known to the public."²

Towards the end of January 1955, "the Company had entered into a "Provisional Agreement" with the Natal Coal Exploration Company Limited, relating to the sale of the coal allotments of the Company in the trades of the Natal Coal Owners' (Pty) Limited, and the Natal Coal Owners' Association, to the Natal Coal Exploration Company Limited; and the transfer of "Coke" allotments of the Company in the trade of Coke Producers Limited to Vryheid Coronation Limited; had been ratified by the Extraordinary General Meeting."³

¹. See Appendix H.
². Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/18, p. 48.
³. Ibid., p. 48.
On 25 February 1955 it was decided that as mining operations were to cease on 31 March, the work connected with the Company's shipment business which was conducted by Messrs King and Sons would fall away as of that date. "It was therefore decided that the Board show its appreciation of the services rendered by Messrs King and Sons by voting them a sum of 250 guineas."  

"The Burnside Number One Mine was officially closed on the 4th March and the Number Three Mine on 25 March 1955." As a result many workers were retrenched. It had been difficult to determine a satisfactory basis on which payment of gratuities was to be made to these retrenched employees. "After careful consideration, however, it was decided that the following bonuses were to be provided:

**WHITES:**

(i) Officials and monthly paid employees with five years service and over, one month's salary plus £10 for each year of service.

(ii) Officials and monthly paid employees with under five years of service but over three years of service, half a month's salary plus £10 for each year of service.

(iii) Daily paid employees with five years of service and over £10 for each year of service.

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4. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/18, p. 53.
5. Ibid., p. 56.
INDIANS:

(i) With thirty years of service and over, £1 for each
    year of service.
(ii) With under thirty years, but not less than twenty
    years of service, fifteen shillings for each year
    of service.
(iii) With under twenty years but not less than three
    years of service, ten shillings for each year of
    service.

BLACKS:

All Natives were to receive ten shillings for each year of service."6

As can be seen this bonus scheme was designed for the benefit of the
white workers only, for a white working for 30 years for example, was
to receive £300 plus his normal salary, whereas an Indian, for the
same number of years of service to the Company was to receive only £30
without a salary, and a Black £15 without a salary. Nevertheless the
bonus scheme was accepted much to the dismay of Indian and Black
employees.

On 31 March 1955, "a special resolution empowering the Directors to
dispose of the Company's mine assets had been ratified at the
Extraordinary General Meeting of Shareholders. The Board had accepted
the offer made by the Natal Navigational Collieries and Estates
Company Ltd; and it was resolved that the sale of the Company's mine

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6. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/18, p. 56.
assets at Burnside Collieries to the Natal Navigational Collieries and Estate Company Ltd; for the sum of one hundred and ninety thousand pounds (£190 000) be confirmed." 7

Arising out of the disposal of the Company's coal allotments to the Natal Coal Exploration Company and the sale of the Company's mine assets to the Natal Navigational Collieries, "surplus funds were made available on 1 April, for investment and it was duly resolved that:

(i) £100 000 be placed at call with Messrs Hut, Leuchers, Hepburn Ltd for a minimum of three months with effect of 1 April 1955, at the rate of 3% per annum, interest to be payable monthly.

(ii) £80 000 be deposited at call with National Finance Corporation of South Africa with effect from 1 April 1955 at the rate of $2^3/8$% per annum." 8

"In August, however, the £80 000 deposited with the National Finance Corporation was withdrawn and placed on a fixed deposit with Building Societies at 4½%. It was also resolved that an interim dividend of 2½% (6d per share) be declared payable on 30 September to all shareholders registered as such in the books of the Company." 9

8. Ibid.
"By 1955 therefore extractions and operations on the Burnside Mines had ceased,"\textsuperscript{10} bringing to a close an important chapter in the history of the Dundee Coal Company. The Burnside Mine, a centrepiece and lifeblood of the Company for over four decades had drawn its curtains, apparently plummeting the Dundee Coal Company into a bleak abyss. However, the closure of the mine had been foreseen, and due to tremendous insight on the part of the authorities, the Dundee Coal Company survived. Its By Products Plant at Waschbank, which had assumed a relatively subsidiary role when the Burnside Mines were in full cry, began to assume much significance and by 1955 had become the only financial source of the Company apart from its investments.

(i) \textbf{THE BY PRODUCTS PLANT}

Deliberations for a By Products Plant began as early as 1917, but it was only in September 1922 that the plant was in full operation. The By Products Plant had been erected largely for the purpose of converting dross into by-products. In the days long gone by, the dross from the coal went to waste, but of recent years chemical science had discovered its sterling values. Thus the dross from the Burnside Mine was piled on to trucks and on the Dundee Coal Company's own railway was shipped to Waschbank, a few miles away.

What happened to the dross there was a fascinating story as wonderful as the legendary miracles of the ancient sorcerers. There was

\textsuperscript{10} See Appendix I.
powerful machinery at the Waschbank factory designed primarily to heat, to cool, and to mix, for that is virtually the secret of modern alchemy. "The layman sees what is going to happen, and he sees it when it has happened, but he can see few of the intermediary stages, for they belong to the realm of chemistry. He sees wheels whinning, fires stoked with 9-ton pokers, vapour and gas being cooled, ingredients mixed, and he sees the results which are manifold."11 Naphthalene of the purest white is extracted from coal of the deepest black. Coal tar, paint, gas, benzol, carbolic acid, dyes and a dozen by-products are extracted from the piles of dross. Practically nothing that enters the factory is wasted.

To describe in detail the methods employed to extract the various by-products would be of little interest; suffice it to say that, "the initial object was to extract from coal, by means of distillation, by heating out of contact with air, the four primary parts of its composition; these were combustible gas, liquor containing ammonia, coke and coal tar."12 From each of these four constituents further by-products were formed.

Chief among the by-products of the factory at Waschbank was coke, which burnt three times as long as coal. In addition to being economical it gave far greater heat and was smokeless. The consensus of opinion among experts who regarded the type of metallurgical coke

produced by the plant was that, "it was equal to anything produced overseas."\textsuperscript{13} It was solid as Firsts for blast furnace work, foundries and general smelting purposes; as Seconds, as a fuel in bakeries, transport vehicles and gas plants. It was a very hard coke and was at times sold as Breeze for smithy and other uses. Coke from the By Products Plant was often in great demand. By the 1950's coke was exported to South America in great quantities. Five thousand tons of coke at a time were fixed for loading to South America. There were problems as far as export to South America was concerned, "brought about largely because the Argentine Government refused import permits."\textsuperscript{14} What is significant nevertheless is the fact that South America actually imported coke from South Africa, Dundee specifically. By 1953, South Africa although the foremost coal producing country in the southern hemisphere, producing about 28 million tons of coal, was the eleventh highest producer when compared to world coal production. The United States of America produced the largest amount, approximately 440 million tons of coal. It is surprising therefore to see that South America actually imported coke from South Africa. Perhaps this was because of its superior quality.

Tar was another important by product. Tar from the Dundee Coal Company was consumed nationally. "The By Products Plant had supplied the Natal Provincial Administration with a combined average of 29 360 gallons Tar Primer and number two Tar per month. By 1955, however,

\textsuperscript{13} H.V. Millington: The Coal Industry of Natal, in Durban Past and Present, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{14} Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/17, p. 161.
the order was reduced to 18,875 gallons per month. The reduction in requisition was attributed to the fact that the Natal Provincial Administration (N.P.A.) began utilizing the services of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company, which supplied bitumen hot in bulk at 1/6d per gallon; whereas the Number Two Tar supplied by Waschbank was 1/3d plus 4d per gallon railage, raising the price to 1/7d."¹⁵ Nevertheless Dundee's services were still entertained because the Standard Vacuum Oil Company could not supply large demands.

In 1961, however, the N.P.A. requested increased supplies of tar. It was ascertained that for the financial year commencing 1 April 1962, "The Province required one and a half times as much tar as they were previously taking; for the following principle reasons, namely:

(i) The tar of the Dundee Coal Company could be used at any point in the province, instead of being confined as hitherto to specific areas in the midlands and northern districts, as the price was at that time cheaper than locally produced bitumen.

(ii) The province was able to increase the amount of road-work partly because the National Transport Commission had received funds for National Roads, and partly because the province itself had voted extra funds for their own provincial roads.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/18, p. 82.
Whereas tar had been used for primary and first coat work it was now to be used to seal the road, as it was proposed to adopt the policy of resealing after 6 to 8 years with a pre-mix carpet which would give much longer life.\textsuperscript{16}

The effect of the foregoing was that the province required during the financial year April 1962 to March 1963, "130 000 gallons of primer and 480 000 gallons of road tar. The average demand per month therefore was 48 000 gallons."\textsuperscript{17}

Apart from the N.P.A. "the By Products Plant also supplied the Cape Provincial Administration with 267 000 gallons of Road Tars, and the Orange Free State Provincial Administration with 150 000 gallons during the period April 1956 to March 1957."\textsuperscript{18}

The Dundee Coal Company did not supply Road Tars to the Transvaal Provincial Administration largely because the Transvaal had their own By Products plant at Sasol and often there was stiff competition from Sasol in securing contracts.

As can be seen from the foregoing paragraphs much of the Company's income was obtained by sales of Tar Prime to the Cape Provincial

\textsuperscript{16.} Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/18, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{17.} Ibid., p. 279.
\textsuperscript{18.} Ibid., p. 103.
Administration, the Natal Provincial Administration and the Orange Free State Provincial Administration. These were not the only sources of income, however, for the sales of crude Naphthalene greatly enhanced monthly profits as well. "National Chemical Products required huge quantities of crude naphthalene for the manufacture of phthalic anhydride and consequently entered into a long term contract with the Dundee Coal Company for the entire output of crude naphthalene, estimated at 20 to 25 tons per month. National Chemical Products agreed to all proposed terms and conditions including the price of £25 per ton. The disposal of this output of crude naphthalene, the major portion of which was dumped resulted in an increased monthly profit of between £500 to £625."19

"By 1959 crude naphthalene was exported far afield as United States and Japan at a price of £23.10.0d per 2 240 lbs; and hot pressed naphthalene to the distant areas of Buenos Aires, Italy, South America and Canada at £70 per metric and £57 per short ton."20

What is evident from this is the fact that the Dundee Coal Company had established for itself a very good reputation abroad, as a result of which it was able to secure a number of long-standing contracts for many of its products.

Creosote which is extensively used by the municipalities for sanitary purposes, was also invaluable for protecting sleepers. "In 1956 the

19. Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/1/18, p. 89.
Dundee Coal Company had been successful in its tender for the supply of 80,000 gallons of creosote to the Government Forestry Department, for the period 1 April 1956 to 31 March 1957."²¹

Pitch which was manufactured to any specification required, was also supplied in small or large quantities. Pitch proved to be a very important by-product of the Company and was also exported in large quantities. "By 1956 the Company was exporting close on to 4,000 tons of pitch to Korea and 1,200 tons to New Zealand. Korea became quite a regular customer of the Company, for the Company was to supply Korea with a further 15,000 tons of pitch during the latter half of 1957."²² In order to satisfy this tremendous demand the Company worked with Iscor to make up the tonnage, largely because it was only capable of providing 4,000 tons itself. The By Product industry at Waschbank was indeed a flourishing industry and had obviously become the cornerstone of the Dundee Coal Company after the death of the Burnside Mines. The number of by-products capable of being extracted from coal is illimitable as is evidenced when one considers its chemical composition. "Coal contains the three elements of creation, earth, air and water, which were put into it ages ago, when it was being formed out of the luxuriant vegetations abundant when the world was young. The sun, the earth and the air combined

²¹ Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/18, p. 101.
²² Ibid., p. 122.
in the magic task of fossilizing the almost completely decarbonizing forest growths of forgotten days. Today chemists are busily engaged in taking out of coal that which Nature put into it."23 This was the process which ensured that the Dundee Coal Company remained a relatively thriving Company as late as the 1960's.

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CONCLUSION

Present day Dundee owes its existence to the speculative and innovative spirit of Peter Smith, pioneer of the coal mining industry in Natal. His mining operations on Coalfields attracted many people to the mines and consequently the need for a town arose. Powerful business associates brought capital into the small mining area, which developed so rapidly and in such style that it became known as "Coalopolis" and the "Capital of Northern Natal".

The founding of the Dundee Coal Company which by the 1900's was employing close on to 2 000 labourers, acted as a catalyst and precipitated further development, ensuring that Dundee had become a recognized dot on the map and a thriving town which could boast modern amenities. The Dundee Coal Company was crucial for the existence of Dundee, for the Company was indeed the hive of activity around which everything else revolved and depended upon. However, many other secondary industries had followed in its wake, such as Consol Glass Works, Alucab and Kilty's Sweet Factory, and have burgeoned over the years, so by 1960 when the coal supplies of the land had been exhausted, and when the Dundee Coal Company decided to lay at rest the shovel, Dundee was already a fully developed and flourishing town.

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1. See Appendix J.
Although the Dundee Coal Company had closed its doors it may be stated with confidence that in general coal mining in Northern Natal is at present a thriving industry. One of the most productive and almost certainly the most highly mechanised collieries in Northern Natal is Durnacol, the old Durban Navigation Colliery, which is owned by Iscor. Most coal produced there is sent northward to be used for coke production and for metallurgical purposes.

"Coal keeps South Africa moving, not only feeding its hungry furnaces and lighting its path, but even oiling its wheels."\(^2\) Of the coal industry, the most eminent experts speak with unbounded optimism, and the prophetic vision respecting coal generally of Sir John Cadman in the Melchett lecture two years ago is equally applicable to this Province. He said, "the future of the coal industry will come to depend more and more on a progressively greater adoption of science to the problem of its transformation into power. There are certain fields which coal, as a solid, can never hope to conquer, but science increasingly applied to coal may enable it to rise - a new Phoenix - from the ashes of its own economical combustion, and seek its salvation in fresh fields and pastures new."\(^3\)

The source of energy that man has learnt to control during the last 3 000 years and the source of energy he discovered yesterday will be harnessed side by side and will continue to confer immeasurable benefits on South Africa.

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2. Coal in South Africa, produced by the Chamber of Mines, p. 32.
The home of Peter Smith, founder of Dundee and of the Dundee coal industry. The simple cottage of this Scottish pioneer dates from the 1870s, but the gabled wing with its marble fireplace was added later. Natal Provincial Museum Services will use relics of the founder families of Dundee to furnish the cottage in period style.

The Natal Witness, 1932
From L. to R.: Dugald MacPhail, William Craighead Smith (son of Peter Smith), Charles C. Wilson, Peter Smith.

Where the Thunder Rolls, 1882-1982, p. 21
Peter and Ann Smith, whose decision to live in South Africa resulted in the opening up of the coal mining industry in Natal and the establishment of the thriving town of Dundee.

APPENDIX G

EXAMPLE OF A BLASTING CERTIFICATE:

COLONY OF NATAL

BLASTING CERTIFICATE

It is hereby stated that... has satisfied me that he is trustworthy and sober, and that he has had at least one year's practical underground experience in mines, during at least three months of which he has been actually employed in the working faces of a mine in which the use of safety lamps is required, and that I have examined him and found that he has a competent knowledge of blasting operations and the regulations and rules referring thereto, and that he has adequate knowledge and eyesight to enable him to test for and ascertain the presence or otherwise of small percentages of firedamp.

This blasting certificate is therefore issued to him under, and in accordance with Regulation 87 of the Regulations framed under Section 143, Natal Mines Act, 1899 for the ................. mine.

................. 19....

Countersigned and registered

................. 19....

MANAGER

...................................

INSPECTOR OF MINES

...................................

Minutes of the Meetings of the Natal Coal Owners' Society, 1909.
<table>
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<th>MONTH</th>
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<td>5,429 9 8 (P)</td>
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Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company, 1/1/17

(in pounds)
Aerial view of the Burnside colliery, which Mr. Lavers took over nine years ago. The picture shows only a small part of the overall view, but gives a good idea of the neat orderliness that adaptation has brought to the rough coal workings.

Supplement to Natal Witness, 1982
SOURCE LIST

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Minutes of the Meetings of the Dundee Coal Company:

(Acc. No. 1336)

Box 1/1/1/4
Box 1/1/1/6
Box 1/1/1/7
Box 1/1/1/9
Box 1/1/1/16
Box 1/1/1/17
Box 1/1/1/18

The above references are to be found in the Natal Archives in Pietermaritzburg.

Minutes of the Meetings of the Natal Coal Owners' Society:

1909; 1950; 1951; 1952; 1953

The above references are to be found in the Talana Museum in Dundee - up to 1953.

SECONDARY SOURCES:


BROCHURES:


NEWSPAPERS:


Supplement to the Financial Mail, 1968

Supplement to the Natal Witness, 1972, 1982