

A PRIDE OF PANNERS

in Edinburgh he was a colliery oversman living at 34 Lammermoor Terrace, Tranent. Perhaps his new marital responsibilities brought the realisation that he should not have been so impulsive in abandoning Broughton High School. That same year he enrolled for a course of study which, due to the necessities of shift working, meant Saturday evening was the only time he could regularly attend classes. The qualifications he obtained after six years' study he could probably have obtained in three years at Broughton High School.

Into Management and Nationalisation

In 1937 he was appointed Under Manager at Michael Colliery in Fife, his first taste of managerial experience. Coal mines were of course then still privately owned and it was possible in a managerial capacity to negotiate personal terms with the mine owners. Through that system Davie returned relatively soon to the Fleets Colliery now as Deputy Manager.

He remained at 'The Fleets' for only a short time. Just prior to World War II Davie moved to the Klondyke pit at Newcraighall to fill the post of Manager. During the first week of February 1941 he received a letter from an old school mate, Thomas Watson, who was employed by the Binley Colliery near Coventry containing a job offer in the post of Colliery Under Manager with a weekly wage of £8/10/- plus 17/- per week 'war bonus' together with a house, free coals and 'other perquisites'. But Davie chose not to accept the offer. No reason can be determined for his decision – perhaps he was still considering it a few months later when Coventry was blitzed by the German Luftwaffe or perhaps he simply preferred to remain in Scotland. He spent the war years as Manager of Newcraighall.

David Spence was still at Newcraighall and a well known local colliery Manager when on 1st January 1947 the newly created National Coal Board assumed responsibility for all British mining. Many of the old mine owners in addition to being financially well compensated for the loss of their pits were also co-opted as Coal Board administrators and board members. That co-option would have undoubtedly been partly responsible for recognition of ability which resulted in David Spence's appointment as Group Manager of the Wallyford Group of collieries, which then included the mines at Carberry, Prestonlinks and Prestongrange. Promotion was rapid and after a relatively short interval he was moved again this time to oversee the much larger Newbattle Group.

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As Newbattle Group Manager David Spence oversaw the gradual run down of pick and shovel coal production and the introduction of massive coal cutting machines. In his time old wooden pit props were also gradually replaced with steel thereby enhancing the safety of workers. Miners' welfare also assumed greater importance with the appearance of pit head baths and canteens where hot food was available if required. First Aid Centres, usually permanently staffed with a nurse, also appeared on pitheads.

Progress in mining was a double edged sword. During the later years of Davie Spence's administration the smaller Lothian pits such as Carberry, Newcraighall, Fleets, Easthouses, Lingerwood, Lady Victoria (which would later also house the Scottish Mining Museum) Rosewell and Burghleigh all closed in favour of larger mines. Monktonhall colliery was opened on the border of East Lothian and Bilston Glen colliery at Loanhead in Midlothian.

In December 1962 almost coincidental with the opening of Monktonhall Colliery coal production ceased at Prestongrange mine. That pit which in 1947, when the National Coal Board assumed ownership, employed 500 producing 144,000 tons a year, was not considered economically suitable for improvement largely due to the high incidence of underground water. Demand for coal was already beginning to decline and Prestongrange was considered expendable.

Almost inevitably following closure neglect of the site led to it becoming overgrown together with a progressive degree of vandalism. The presence of underground water which had been considered a prime factor leading to the mine's closure had, until 1954, been controlled with pumps operated by the Cornish Beam Engine on the pithead. This engine, installed in 1874 and the only surviving one of its type in Scotland, became so badly vandalised that in 1968 the National Coal Board decided it should be demolished in the interest of safety.

Creating Prestongrange Museum

By this time in his sixty-eighth year Davie Spence, though long retired, was an acknowledged mining historian still much in demand as a speaker and columnist. Indeed he often claimed to have retired early so he could write about mining history. He had observed with growing dismay and indignation the steady degeneration of his former Prestongrange workplace and was appalled at the proposition to destroy the beam

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engine. He initiated urgent action primarily to save the engine, but along with it he carried the entire site to create a Scottish mining museum.

Details of his actions in that respect are much too extensive to record here but after enlisting the invaluable assistance of Frank Tindall, East Lothian's legendary County Planning Officer, agreement was reached with the National Coal Board that East Lothian Council would acquire the old Prestongrange colliery site.

On 16th July 1968 a committee with representatives of the National Coal Board, National Union of Mineworkers, East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists Society, Institute of Mechanical Engineers, The Royal Scottish Museum and the Council together with David Spence was constituted. Its mission was: "*To explore the possibility of establishing a historical site for the East Lothian Mining Industry at Prestongrange and report back to the Planning Committee*".

As the explorations began a team of some twenty volunteers was recruited to repair and restore the Cornish Beam Engine. That team worked under the direction of Davie Spence, James Blaik – a retired colliery electrician – and William Scott. There was also input from Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh. The initial restoration was successful and over the ensuing years the mining museum steadily took shape. A group of secondary schoolboys from Portobello began to provide help twice weekly at the embryo museum. Their technical teacher at Portobello, Colin Oswald, claimed the restoration work made the boys keener on an engineering career.

With the assistance of the National Coal Board and many other bodies there was a progressive expansion. The Council also later acquired the old Morison's Haven site together with the Prestongrange Brick and Fireclay Pipe Works and the pithead baths. Some other enthusiastic volunteers formed *The Prestongrange Society* which became engaged in the ongoing refurbishment and restoration of the site.

From its inception, David Spence was acknowledged as the Museum's prime administrator and procurer of services. He was responsible for obtaining many fine exhibits of colliery equipment and associated items of interest including working examples of 'pugs' or colliery locomotives, cranes and winding gear. Later in life he also donated all his many personal mining artefacts. Although initial progress was relatively slow by 1980 the growth of the museum had made it necessary to employ a full time caretaker. Also in that year, a Management

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Committee and Working Party were formed with Davie involved in both at nearly eighty years of age. He was appointed lifetime Honorary Curator of the Museum and all his efforts resulted in the award of his M.B.E.

During 1981/1982 the Scottish Development Agency carried out final re-grading and landscaping at the museum including better road access, foot paths and car parks.

The official opening of the Mining Museum took place at Prestongrange on 28th September 1984. Development expenditure on the project up to that time was given as £1m. The inauguration took place at a time of some turbulence within the mining industry which was in the throes of a protracted national strike. National Union of Mineworkers officials decided at the last moment not to attend the opening, probably due to the attendance of Members of Parliament and ranking National Coal Board officials – which was a most unfortunate political distraction for such proceedings. And the other absentee alas was David Spence himself who had been hurt in a fall the previous evening and was in hospital.

It can be unequivocally observed that without the Herculean leadership of David Spence there would be no mining museum at Prestongrange. And to honour his memory today's stewards face the challenge of making it live again.

He died the following year on 28th December at Longmore Hospital Edinburgh. *The East Lothian Courier* Obituary published on 10 January 1986 provides a condensed and factual biographical account of his life and achievements which justifiably describes David Spence as 'Founder of the Scottish Mining Museum at Prestongrange', a view echoed by East Lothian Local Councillor Tom Wilson in the September 1986 issue of *Coalface*. Tom Wilson wrote: "The Scottish Mining Museum remains indebted to him for it was his drive and enthusiasm which laid the foundations on which the Scottish Mining Museum Trust continues to build."

Acknowledgements

Coalface Magazine

Edinburgh Evening News

The Scotsman

East Lothian Courier

David Spence Archive, East Lothian Library H.Q.

Registers for Scotland

John Muir Papers, Holt Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library

THE BARON COURTS OF PRESTOUNGRANGE & DOLPHINSTOUN

Barons traditionally exercised their feudal rights and authority through Baron Courts until 1948, of which the main Officers were the Baron Bailie and the Baron Sergeand. Financial matters were attended to by the Baron's Procurator Fiscal, viz: "The Baron's Court" (1994) and "The Insignia of the Baronage of Scotland and Their Courts" (1989), published by the Convention of the Baronage of Scotland.

These Courts with these designated Officers were re-established for Prestoungrange and for Dolphinstoun in 1998 as a Company Limited by Guarantee. In 2002 they evolved to become a Scottish Charity (SC 033139) whose Objects are to advance the industrial and agricultural heritage of the Baronies in the new millennium working as may be appropriate with other community organisations. Myriad educational activities are in hand with the Prestoungrange Arts Festival involving pottery and historical murals. The 1908 Gothenburg has been restored for 21st Century use and as a heritage centre. The insignia and regalia of the Baronies have been invoked including Courts' Horns, Baronial Coronets, Bailie's Badge and Chain, and Sergeand's Ellwand. Lord Lyon has granted Arms to current incumbents and the Prestoungrange tartan has been registered as shown on the rear cover here.

