

Loganlea Colliery Baths

Interview with Ex-Provost Doonan

Several weeks ago we announced that preparations had commenced at Loganlea Colliery, owned by the United Collieries Ltd, for the erection of Pithead Baths. Although Loganlea Colliery is on the Midlothian side of the Almond, it is recognised and classed as a West Lothian Colliery, and is subject to all the rules which govern miners and other colliery workers employed in West Lothian. In view of the fact that this would be the first Colliery in West Lothian to establish Pithead Baths, Ex-Provost Doonan, agent for West Lothian Miners, was asked to give a few opinions on the undertaking:

Epoch making

“In my view”, said Mr Doonan to our representative, “this establishing pithead baths at Loganlea Colliery will be epoch making, and I am certain that when it is realised how much miners and other colliery workers and their wives and dependants will benefit, it will be just a matter of time when pithead baths will be common to all collieries in West Lothian, where such a scheme is possible. What I mean by possible is that, as the scheme is a costly one, pithead baths will only be erected where there is assured a fairly good length of working years for the Colliery, Pithead baths will do a great deal to raise the social status of the pit workers. They would enable miners to have a new view point, enable them to have more pride in themselves, help their health, but, to me, not the least important happening will be that miners’ wives will have no worries about drying wet pit clothes, miners’ homes will be healthier and cheerier, for the children will now have their proper share of the kitchen fire.”

Wet clothes keeping bairns from the fire

“Yes,” remarked Mr Doonan, “I know what it is to see, on a winter’s night, pit clothes hanging before a kitchen fire, with the bairns being kept back from the warmth that they so much desired, and having to do their school lessons under anything but cheerful conditions. When the men have been working in a particularly wet pit, then the atmosphere is anything but pleasant, and how our miners’ wives are able to keep their homes so clean and tidy, is a marvel to those not connected with the mining industry. We in the industry know, however, what it means to our women folk. It is just unending hard work. Even in summer weather, when we have a spell of wet weather, big fires have to be kept on – often far into the morning – so that the pit clothes will be ready for the workers. Thus the coming of pithead baths will save our women folks from drudgery, while our children will be enabled to enjoy a happy evening gathering round the kitchen fire every night and not just two nights and sometimes, as in the old days, only one night in the week.”

A gentleman in plus fours

Then in these days when miners have to make long travels to their work, and have recourse to the useful and popular omnibus, he will be able to travel like any ordinary tradesman. At present, it must be admitted a lady in bright attire, or a gentleman in plus-fours will not give a hearty welcome to a miner if he were in his wet clothes, to sit down beside either. Of course a miner would not do that, he has more respect for himself, but all the same he is conscious and he realises that in like circumstances he would have the same feeling. The coming of Pithead

Baths will alter all that. He will go to his work in his 'walking out' attire. He will come up the pit, have his bath, and again don his 'walking out' attire, and be able to go anywhere knowing that he will be heartily welcomed. Thus he will have a real respect for himself and that is all to the good."

Bathing weakens a man

"It has often been argued that miners using the baths would be very liable to catch cold. This was a prejudice that was hard to kill. The prejudice was wrong. There was more liability for a man, travelling in wet clothes to catch cold, than a man taking a bath and then donning dry clothes to make the home journey."

"I am satisfied that once the baths are in operation at Loganlea, and the good results that will accrue all round, the miners' wives and the miners' children will be the ones who will be most active in a movement for pithead baths at every colliery where practical."

Lockers, baths and spray

At Loganlea there are between 500 and 600 workers. The building will occupy fully a quarter of an acre of ground. There will be double-decked lockers for each man, one in which he will store his 'walking out' suit of clothes, and one for his pit clothes. There will be baths with hot water and a spraying arrangement. There will be a canteen where 50 men can be seated at one time, and a First Aid Room, where, in the event of an accident, the men will have timeous help given them.

Raise the social status of miners

The pithead baths scheme is undertaken by the Miners' Welfare Fund Committee for the district, and Loganlea men elected that pithead baths will be set up for them. In other centres, the men have halls built, institutes and recreation grounds set up; even Loganlea has a hall. I think the pithead baths scheme will do the greatest good to the greatest number for not only will the workers benefit, but the women and children in their homes will also benefit. Yes, Pithead baths, will, as I said at the beginning, raise considerably the social status of the miners."

West Lothian Courier, 26 July 1929, page 29