

Carlow, Charles Augustus (1878-1954), mining engineer and manager, was born at 2 Links Place, Scoonie, Fife, on 30 November 1878, the eldest son of Charles Carlow (1849-1923), a colliery manager of the Fife Coal Company, and his wife Mary Weatherstone née Lindsay (1851-1929), the daughter of William Lindsay (1819-1884), the Provost of Leith between 1860 and 1866 and the first Chairman of the Fife Coal Company. Charles Augustus Carlow was the exact namesake of his grandfather (1824-1887) who rose from unprivileged beginnings to become the general manager of a group of collieries at Halbeath, near Dunfermline.

Under Charles Carlow's management the Fife company gained an enduring reputation for technical innovation, technical excellence and expansion and Charles Augustus Carlow was educated to follow in his footsteps. During 1894-96 he took junior and senior classes in mathematics and engineering at Heriot-Watt College in Edinburgh before starting as a mine engineering student at the Leven office of the Fife Coal Company in 1896. He continued his studies at the Cowdenbeath School of Mines where he was a medallist in 1897-98 and 1898-99 and at the Mining College in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire. At some point during his youth or early adulthood he studied at the University of Edinburgh.

He gained a first class Colliery Manager's Certificate in 1901 in the West of Scotland District and also attended the Wigan School of Mines where he passed the examinations for a first class certificate in the Manchester District. He undertook practical training in large collieries in Lancashire, Northumberland and North Durham as well as in the Fife Coal Company's pits. This was an exceptionally broad training.

Carlow entered the management of the Fife Coal Company as an assistant manager in 1900 and became the General Manager in 1911. In 1913, at the same time as Adam Nimmo, Carlow joined the Board of Directors and in 1917 he became Joint Managing Director with his father. His increasing prominence as one of the chief engineers of one of the largest and most successful colliery companies in the UK brought him the Presidency of the Association of Mining Electrical Engineers for the year 1919-20. Following the death of his father, Carlow became the sole Managing Director in April 1923. Sir Adam Nimmo became Chairman. During the late 1920s and early 1930s as the British and then the world economy slumped, the Company closed down a number of its collieries with speed and ruthlessness. The focus of management turned from expansion to competition. They sought to produce coal at a lower price than their competitors, a common

objective, but also to produce coal of a better quality, a concern which was much less usual. In 1933 the Company began a substantial series of new developments including the Kinglassie Mine in 1934 and Comrie Colliery in 1938. In 1935 it was the second largest colliery company in Scotland by output and the eighth largest in the UK . It was also one of the most profitable.

Carlow was one of the very few owners or managers who greeted with favour Part II of the Coal Mines Act 1930 which provided for the compulsory amalgamation of groups of collieries. The Coal Mines Reorganisation Commission (CMRC), established under the Act and under the chairmanship of Sir Ernest Gowers drew up one of its biggest schemes for Fife, proposing that all the county's collieries should be amalgamated into one concern. Carlow saw the scheme as a way of reducing costs and improving production, spelled out the economies of scale that colliery consolidations could yield, and spoke publicly in its favour; he and the rest of the Board of Directors were also confident that the Fife Coal Company would dominate any forthcoming amalgamation and that the identity and the culture of the company would continue. Other coal companies in Fife, notably the Wemyss Coal Co., moved successfully to block the scheme and the CMRC had little choice but to abandon it.

Carlow's focus in colliery management was on reducing costs and improving the value of the product, not on cutting wages, extending hours, or lifting prices. His method was to approach problems with painstaking thoroughness, and through detailed investigation of technical problems. It was very much an engineer's approach and one that stood in marked contrast to the solutions put forward by his colleague on the Board of Directors, Sir Adam Nimmo. In 1937, as president of the Institution of Mining Engineers, Carlow emphasized the importance of planning. Every 'unit of labour', every machine, every service needed to be considered and placed in its proper relation to the whole and every cost and output accounted for. It was work that required a separate staff and Carlow was one of the first in the industry to consider the appropriate managerial division of labour.

The Fife Coal Company was in many ways a highly progressive company, though it performed poorly in the area of industrial relations, in which Carlow seemed to have had little interest and in safety. Production was disrupted on many occasions by strikes at the company's collieries. The Fife Coal Company, unlike the Wemyss Coal Company and many others in

Scotland and England, had little tradition of paternalism. Although the company had provided housing of a relatively high standard and had donated Blair Castle, a large Georgian mansion on the northern shore of the Firth of Forth near Culross, to form a miners' convalescent home in memory of Charles Carlow in 1924, it had little involvement in community life. Carlow's mother busied herself with Sunday School work in Kelty and hosted an annual tea for aged residents but Carlow himself, unmarried, took no part in the social life of the areas such as Kelty, which his company dominated. The Company formed close relations with the Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan and Miners' Association run by William Adamson but the Association's closeness to the Company and its undemocratic structures led to the formation of breakaway and rival unions in the 1920s and 1930s and widespread non-unionism. The Company took advantage of poor union organisation and, in the 1930s, high unemployment to pursue an authoritarian and aggressive industrial relations strategy involving the importation of strike breakers, evictions from Company housing, and victimization. Lumphinnans, a mining village between Lochgelly and Cowdenbeath largely built by the Company, became a focus of activity by the Communist Party, a 'Little Moscow'. In 1935 Willie Gallacher was elected as the Communist MP for West Fife, the constituency in which most of the Company's workers lived.

By the late 1930s a culture of guerrilla warfare and lightning strikes had become entrenched.

Carlow's record in the area of safety was at first sight quite different. His father had been closely associated with the first mine Rescue Station in Scotland set up in Cowdenbeath in 1910 and had founded a Safety Department in the Company in the same year.

Under Charles Augustus Carlow's management, a Safety Engineer was appointed for the Cowdenbeath group of collieries in 1934, and an unrelenting campaign of safety messages, investigations and innovations was undertaken. In 1938 the number of compensatable injuries per 100,000 manshifts was less than half what it had been before the safety campaign began and the accident rate at the Company had fallen to a third of the average for the British coal mining industry. Despite this, an explosion at Valleyfield Colliery on 28 October 1939 killed 35 men. The official report by HM Inspector of Mines noted a number of contraventions of the Coal Mines Regulation Acts by the Fife Company, though in the subsequent prosecutions the Company escaped with convictions for only minor offences.

By the 1930s Carlow had attained a leading position in the industry. He was made Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Fife Company in 1937 and Chairman in 1939 on the death of Sir Adam Nimmo. Carlow's first cousin Charles Carlow Reid (1879-1961) succeeded him as general manager in 1939. The latter's son William Reid (1906-1985), was a manager at the Fife Coal Company and later Chairman of the Scottish and then the Durham Divisions of the National Coal Board. Another first cousin was Charles Augustus Carlow Muir (1892-1989), a journalist and novelist usually writing as Augustus Muir and sometimes as 'Austin Moore', and the author of a history of the Fife Coal Company.

Carlow remained as Chairman until the liquidation of the Fife Company in May 1952 subsequent to nationalization. He became, by his example, and that of his associates and pupils, one of the leading influences on the management of the National Coal Board in its formative years. In politics he was a Unionist and in religion he was an adherent of the Church of Scotland. He died at his home Kincaple House, at Kincaple near St Andrews, on 13 August 1954.

Quentin Outram