

# Accident at Craiglea Quarry

## Introduction

Craiglea Quarry high on the hills of Logiealmond produced good slate, and different parts of the face yielded different colours - green, blue, purple. It had been worked for over a hundred years, but, at 1500 feet above sea level and two miles from the road, transport was a challenge and an expense, and activity was limited in winter.

Management of the workings had been let out for many years but by 1897 the landowner, the Earl of Mansfield, had taken it in hand and appointed a new manager. Angus White came from Easdale, where he had gained a good reputation for effective innovation by introducing railways and other machinery to overcome the serious problems of the workings there as the slate was at and below sea level. He moved into Kipney Cottage on the track up to the quarry with his family and stayed the rest of his life.

Craiglea quarry had been worked into the hillside and also down into the ground. Rather than cut away the ground in front, tunnels were dug for access and drainage; the larger was about 200 yards long and 7 feet high.

## The Accident

On 20<sup>th</sup> May 1897 about 9.30 am. it was necessary to shift more rock out of the face for slate making. Donald Graham was the foreman of the gang working in this section and was responsible for blasting work. He set a charge that didn't dislodge the face. This was not unusual and so he set a second.

He gave the warning and the fourteen men working in this area, including Graham, went into the tunnel mouth as usual, about 10-12 feet from the entrance. Graham told one of them, John Menzies, to move further in.

At the blast a one and a half ton block hurtled across 38 yards to the tunnel entrance and 10 yards into it, ricocheting off the roof and walls, and some smaller rocks also flew in the entrance. The large boulder killed John Menzies and Archibald McEachan outright although they were among those furthest into the tunnel, and trapped Donald McGillivray by the leg. Seven men were injured and four were untouched.

The quarrymen did what they could for the injured, and sent for help. Mr White, the manager came up from Kipney with his son and a friend, a medical student. The doctor came from Trinity College which was three miles way, probably crossing the Almond by footbridge or ford, and their ambulance which must have come round by road arrived about 11; the doctor came from Methven, about seven miles away; and by one o'clock the St Andrews ambulance had arrived from Perth, twelve miles away, to take the most seriously injured to Perth Royal Infirmary.

## **The Dead**

Donald McGillivray died under the anaesthetic as they amputated his leg. He was only 22 and came from Skye and lived in the Bothy up at the quarry. He was buried in Perth. The Estate gave £20 to his family who were said 'to be in poor circumstances'.

John Menzies came from Bankfoot and was buried there. He had worked at the quarry for about 10 years, and stayed in the Bothy, presumably going home when he could. He was 51, and had a family of five – including three daughters, two of them working in Edinburgh, a son of 13 who was 'simple' and a son of 9 at school. Estate papers say they were offered £15 for the funeral and '£1/week for not more than 10 years'.

Archibald McEachern was 23, unmarried, and came from Luss on Loch Lomond, another slate area, but had been at Craiglea for four years with two of his brothers. The inventory of his possessions includes £51 in a Perth bank, £70 in a Glasgow bank and a watch valued at £5. The Estate paid funeral expenses of £5.7.0 for his burial at Luss.

## **The Injured**

Archibald's older brother Duncan was seriously injured, with a large wound and compound fracture of his right arm, scalp wounds and concussion. The doctor reported they were trying to save his arm. The Minister at Luss wrote to say the parents were old and dependent on their sons who worked at Craiglea.

The other injured men were:

- Thomas McKechnie, 27, from Easdale was living at Reisk, a group of seven small cottages below the quarry. Lawyers contacted the estate on his behalf quoting the 1880 Employers Liability Act and claiming he might be permanently incapacitated from scalp wounds and shock, and was initially unable to recognise people. Estate papers make it clear that all their offers were voluntary and admitted no liability, and they would fight any legal proceedings.
- David Bruce, 25, was from Little Dunkeld, another slate producing area. He and his family also lived at Reisk. The doctor reported that he had a 'fissured fracture of the skull and scalp wounds', and was in hospital for three weeks.
- James Dewar, 32, came from Milrodgie near Buchanty, at least three miles southwest of the quarry. He also had a fractured skull, which had to be trepanned, and cuts to the head.
- Hugh Campbell, 33, who lived in Harrietfield, walked away from the quarry with his father and did not think there was much wrong with him, but he had a compound fracture of the skull, and was in hospital for three weeks. He commented when the Perthshire Advertiser interviewed him at PRI ' I didn't expect to be here yesterday morning when I left my wife and bairns'.
- John Campbell, 25, from Easdale was married and living in Harrietfield. Luckily he was not so badly injured.

- Donald Graham, 43, from Buchanty was the foreman and very experienced. He had worked in slate quarrying for 20 years and been in Logiealmond for most of twelve years. He gave detailed evidence at the Fatal Accident Inquiry about the blasting operation. He was knocked unconscious, and said he was still not quite right by the time of the Inquiry.

### **The FAI and after**

The Fatal Accident Inquiry was held on 12<sup>th</sup> June in Perth with judge and jury, and the Inspector of Mines attended. Statements were taken and witnesses cross-examined. Donald Graham, in particular, was questioned about both the charges set. The conclusion summarised what had actually happened and how, and not whether anyone was at fault. There seemed some uncertainty about the amount of powder used, but the conclusion seemed to be that it was an accident due to unknown fissures in the rock.

Four of the seven men injured returned to work at Craiglea – David Bruce, Hugh Campbell, John Campbell and Donald Graham. The quarry was doing well in the 1890s though it was at its peak in the new century. 35 men living in Logiealmond worked there in 1891 and 66 in 1901 - the Perthshire Advertiser said 90 worked there at the time of the accident, but I doubt it was as many. It had closed by the First World War.

Though the quarry had been valued at over £1000 in the Valuation Rolls in the late 1870s, between 1889 and 1897 it paid no rates as it was claimed that it was 'not worked at a profit'. The year after the accident a rating valuation was reinstated at £50.

**Footnote.** This account is based on a number of records. The reports in the Perthshire Advertiser are full and vivid though some details, such as names and numbers, may not be accurate. Other sources include estate papers, the census returns, valuation rolls, wills and testaments.

The tunnel at Craiglea 1897  
Photographer Henry Coats, Trinity College, Glenalmond

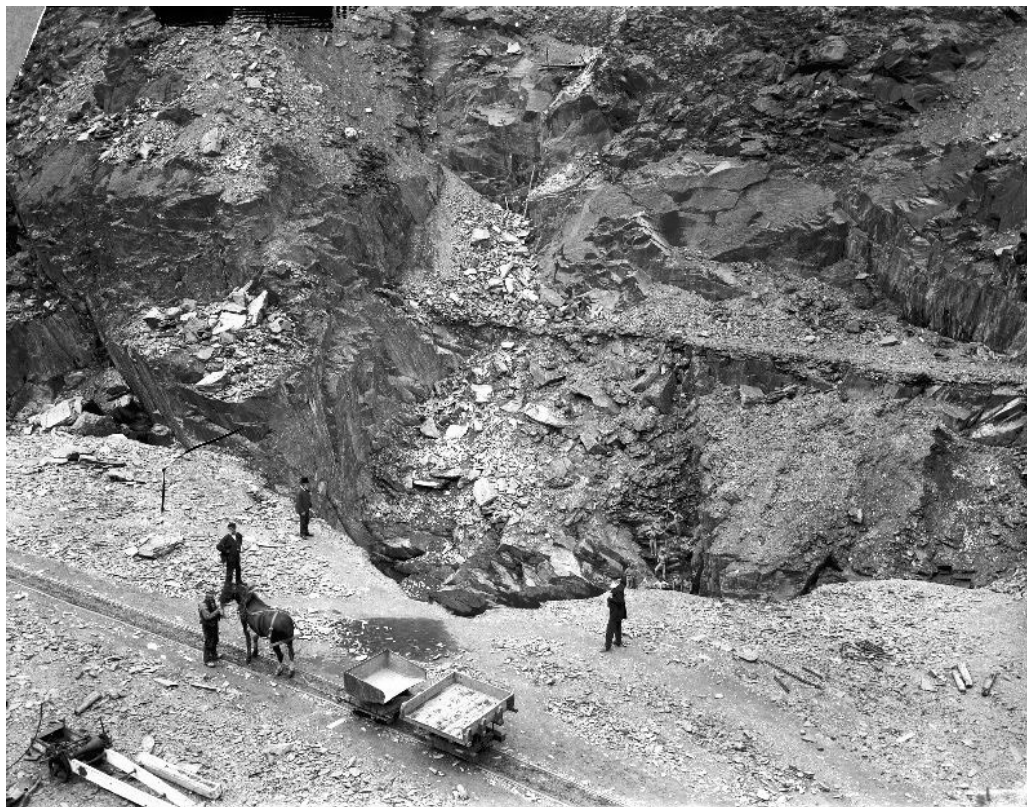


**Craiglea slate quarry.** Photographer, Magnus Jackson 1880  
Courtesy of Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Perth and Kinross Council

Looking south over the bothy and slate making



Looking north. The tunnel runs under the foreground level and the working face is across a vast gap. Can you see five men working on the far face to right of the men in the foreground - you may need to zoom in?



Rosalind Pearson