



A few personal memories of David Rankin

David Rankin passed away on 20 December 2015, just two days short of his 84th birthday.

He was a member of the SAIMM for 59 years, having joined as a student member in November 1956. He subsequently became a Member in 1970 and was elected a Fellow in January 1971.

Dave Rogans, a former work colleague and friend of David Rankin, writes:

Dave joined Amcoal, the Anglo Coal Division, in 1973 and when I followed him a year later he was busy commissioning Kriel and Arnot collieries to supply the adjacent Eskom power stations. At this stage our production was less than 11 million tons per annum and much of it came from highly labour-intensive mines (lots of shovel work). At the end of his career, Dave left a company with a capacity of 60 million tons per annum with more modern mining methods in use.

When Jim Braithwaite retired in 1980, David became Managing Director of the Division and I was appointed as his deputy. We sat in two corner offices with an office for our secretary in between, which meant that our contact was always close. There was much to do and he was always very fair in the distribution of the workload and, more importantly, never selfish.

His achievements included the negotiation with SAR to build the line to Richards Bay which enabled us to produce coal for export. This required two new mines and the upgrading of a third. More significantly, it involved difficult negotiations with our overseas customers, especially the Japanese, who had much more experience in this field when buying coal for their steel industry.

His relationship with Eskom was excellent and resulted in two more large collieries and coal supply contracts which both parties liked! A senior Eskom engineer mentioned to me that the then chairman was concerned that Anglo always had the best proposals and he felt that they were becoming too dependent on us! He asked his department to tickle up other suppliers to match Anglo's proposals.

New Vaal Colliery was unique in that it was mining coal, using opencast methods, that had previously been mined by underground methods. When one mines a 4-metre seam using pillar methods and takes only the bottom 2 metres, then a lot of coal is left behind. As I remember, Dave calculated that a field that looked mined out had 94% of the coal left in it!

New Denmark colliery was also remarkable in that it was the first time that longwall mining was used in South Africa, so that all the coal in the seam was recovered.

New Vaal and New Denmark each supplied 3600 megawatt power stations.

I quote the mines that Dave was responsible for developing to illustrate his great imagination, drive, and courage. I found it astonishing that I never knew him to show any sign of irritation or lose his temper ... we had a strong Chairman!

I was close to Dave for some 16 years until my retirement in 1990. I have always believed that you can learn a lot about a person by knowing the children. My wife and I watched Jane and Ann grow into wonderful people and Dave must have been very proud of them; it was much his doing.

D. Rogans