

# Lament for a power station



The end of the age of coal, Cockenzie power station

So the twin towers of Cockenzie Power Station have gone. "It's sad," said the lady standing beside me as we watched them fall. There were tears in her eyes.

And she wasn't the only one to breathe a sigh of lament. You could hear the crowd gasp as the explosion boomed across the waterfront. Thousands of people lined the shore, a flotilla of small boats stretched out into Forth, one adventurer had even taken to his microlite to watch from the air.

The 150m Cockenzie chimney stacks have dominated the East Lothian coast for the last 50 years. They became a landmark in people's lives....people passing on the motorway or the train, people seeing them from the Fife coast or from ships at sea, or from aircraft coming into land at Edinburgh Airport. They landmarked the lives of the 500 people who worked in the power station at any one time and the 5,000 folk who lived in the combined villages of Cockenzie and Port Seton. Among them were my parents, my father being the local parish minister here in the 1980s.

The passing of the chimney stacks also marks the end of the Age of Coal. The last remaining coal-fired power station in Scotland, Longannet, is due to close next year. There are no more deep mines left and coal has become an unacceptable source of energy since we woke up to the threat of climate change.

Cockenzie was built in 1967, as its utilitarian architecture revealed. It was big, ugly, modern, imposing and powerful, with a capacity of producing 1200 megawatts of electricity, providing energy for much of Central Scotland. It originally burnt coal from the mines directly beneath it. As the deep

seams ran out, it changed to open-cast coal and finally to imported coal from Russia. But in March 2013, its owners, Scottish Power, finally decided its days were over. There were thoughts of converting it into a gas fired power station but these have now been abandoned. The only plan left for the site is as a deep-water terminal for cruise liners.

As the lady said, it is sad to see Cockenzie towers go. But, actually, I am glad we are moving on. Coal is a finite resource and a dirty one. I am particularly glad men don't have to go down mines any more, it was an inhuman task. But the fall of those great chimneys leaves a question mark rising in the dust. How are we going to power our country in the future ?