

AM SIDE ONE

AM Well, I left the school at fourteen years old, in Easter, 1923, and I was three days off the school, when I got a temporary job in Broxburn Co-operative as an assistant grocer, as there was a fever epidemic on at that time, and it was to fill a lad's place, which I knew was a temporary job. And.....within a fortnight of starting that job, I got a letter from Middleton, where I had.....previously, I had placed my name in search of a job, as an apprentice. And this letter referred to that, and told me to.....would I come and see a Mr. Morrison who was the chief architect at the Scottish Oils offices at Middleton Hall. After seeing him, I had to go and see the foreman joiner, a Mr. Shepherd, he is now deceased, and so is Mr. Morrison as far as I hear, deceased. He told me to start on the Monday..... so I went back to the Co-operative and thanked them very much for the two weeks that I had had, and said that I'm afraid that they would have to look for somebody else, and I took up my appointment with Scottish Oils at Middleton Hall, where for the first six months, I was in the sawmill. I was learning a little bit about the machinery and how to work them and so on. Then when they needed a boy outside as there were quite a few apprentices.....I was apprentice to a man called Wullie Meikle who was outside foreman at that time, and the housing that was being erected at Pumpherston at that particular time.....we were going in to 1924 by this time, I think.....and the housing that was being constructed was opposite the school.

GC Letham Park?

AM Letham Park, Where three or four joiners and a few bricklayers and so on, were going on with the job. This job was finished, and being the boy on the job, I was left with all the wee nicky-nacky jobs for the incoming tenants and so on. Then from there to the Roman Camps with the same man, Mr. Meikle to erect small bathrooms at the then

miners rows at the Roman Camps Works. And.....from there to the Holygate in Broxburn.....

GC What were you involved in, at the Roman Camps? What type of work were you doing?

AM Building bathrooms!

GC Aye, but you as a joiner.....as an apprentice joiner.....roofs?

AM Oh aye, roofs, and hanging doors and.....

GC Hanging doors.....?

AM And replacing windows, and putting in the boring for concrete roofs, and coal house doors and converting old dustbins, you would call them..... in brackets, into wash houses, for each of the people.

GC There were middens still there, when they.....?

AM Aye, when they were converted! Into wash houses! And from there to the Holygate. Now, the Holygate was something similar to the Roman Camps, it was terraced houses, and they didn't have bathrooms or toilets, and the erection of porches at the front, similar to the style in Pumpherston, or at Broxburn, which included a toilet, and a sink, and a new innovation to the Scottish Oils, a bath! But that didn't prove very successful!

GC Why was that?

AM The bath.....in the same space.....when you opened the door of the toilet when no-one was using the toilet.....you opened the door, and it formed part of the screen for the bath, and a wooden beam put along the top of the building, carried a huge rubber apron

or curtain to fix up to the door, which formed a whole wall behind the bath, and that would screen whoever got in the bath, but they hadn't reckoned on hot water systems. So, there was no hot water, and you know, the miners weren't just going to wash in cold water! However, before the job was complete, they had discovered the lack of that, and they sort of introduced a gas system at Broxburn, when it was supplied with gas, and they brought in this gas system to heat the water, which was a boiler, a copper boiler with an angled iron up in the corner, and the boiler sitting on it, above the bath, which was very dangerous, and a pipe leading in with gas, from the main outside, plus the water and it only heated enough water to wash your feet. So you would have to sit and wash your feet and wait until the next drop of water was ready for the rest, but many months after leaving that job, when it was finished.....

GC Were you still serving your time at that time?

AM Oh yes! Oh aye, the same old joiner and I got word we were now working at Milnhaugh, and we got word to go down and measure the baths for lids, such was the carry on in those days, the miners justcouldn't be bothered with that, they still just would rather have their tin bath in front of the fire. I couldn't blame them, being in a cold, cold scullery, frozen to death, trying to get a wash in cold water.

GC So why did they want lids for the baths?

AM Aye.....well, we went down and we measured them and we came back up and took so many hundred yards of flooring with us, and we made.. flooring lids, and bolted them with roofing bolts, with the hook under the rim of the bar, and told the people that they weren't to use them! That was that.....because one or two...not them all.... and there were forty eight people in.....forty eight families in the Holygate, and one or two were using them as coal bins, and one or two were using them as cycle stores, and eventually some took

the baths out, and I don't know where they went, nobody knows where they went, they got rid of them, and had the full space to themselves but that was another experience. Then I left there and went to Grangemouth, to two farms, but I can't remember the names of them... no, I can't remember the names of the farms.....

GC Did they belong to the Company?

AM They all belonged to the Company, aye! And it was to repair them for the farmers.

GC And what type of repairs did you do there?

AM Oh, anything at all, the barns.....repairing the barns, repairing the house, the windows, doors, roofs, floors, anything connected with woodwork, or glazing, and the plumbers were there, doing plumber work, the bricklayers doing brickwork and then we were building an off new building, for the chickens and the pigs and so on, for the different farms, but that eventually wore out and we went from there to.....I'm stretching the mind a bit now.....from there to jobbing on the house repairs in all the villages, Seafield, Livingston

GC So, you could be sent anywhere?

AM Anywhere, aye!

GC Any of the Scottish Oils houses?

AM From Middleton Hall, aye! Winchburgh, Niddry.....which is now defunct there is not a Niddry....Broxburn....which there is nothing left of.....all been repaired..... they've been renewed, all new houses there and.....

GC And your time still wasn't out?

AM In between going to these different places, we had spells of maybe six months, maybe seven months, maybe eight months in Glasgow, at the then General Manager of the B.P., Mr. Fraser.....his brother's garage, A & D Fraser, of Maxwell Park, Glasgow.....as an apprentice I was still through there in lodgings, working.....building new additions to the huge garages that he had. Which, at one time, had started as private lock ups, but had now, throughout the years, with Middleton Hall, going through, added another bit and another bit, thus the great big garage was to be seen in this field, the whole field, full of different buildings, belonging to A & D Fraser, and I don't know whether they still have that or not! And their main showrooms were at fifty seven maybe or fifty eight Bothwell Street, where the main offices of the Scottish Oils were in 1953. Many a time, we were at 53 Bothwell Street, and I was there when they added a whole storey to the actual building as it sat, and the same foreman was there, Wullie Meikle, and there were quite a few joiners. Then it was back home to Middleton Hall, and it was.....we worked at the different Institutes belonging to the Scottish Oils, Winchburgh, Uphall Station, Broxburn, Tarbrax, and we were there.....well, not actually at the dismantling but when were repairing the houses at Woolfords, which is just down the road, two or three miles from..... what was the name of it.....

GC Tarbrax?

AM Tarbrax, aye! And we had to go up and strip doors, windows from some of the houses that had been vacated, and get them in the van when it came up at night, to bring them back down to Woolfords, and then the next day we repaired the houses in Woolfords.....

GC So, you were kind of cannibalising.....?

AM Oh aye, you were everywhere! Aye, just stealing here.....you weren't stealing.....it belonged to them.....aye, but, well, they reckoned these other houses would be going down too, soon, but it didn't

happen, and then there was Oakbank.....repairs again, Livingston..
.....and then there were bathrooms and attic rooms added on at
Livingston Station, and that was quite a job, and I wasn't on it
all the time, but I was on it back and forward, and.....but by
this time, I was getting older, of course, and I was at Grangemouth
working.

GC Was your time out now?

AM Not yet!

GC Not yet! Alright!

AM Oh, there is a lot of travels! And finally it came to.....I was at
Grangemouth, on that big building, that they were putting up, and
we finished there and I went through to Bothwell Road, in Hamilton,
and built a big garage there for A & D Fraser, right on the main
Bothwell Road, next to the racecourse, and the garage ran from the
main road right into the racecourse, where we could see the horse
racing for nothing, if we were there at the right time, and we did
see it once and that was quite enjoyable, and that was the foreman
on that job was a wee man called Bobby Gardner, who later travelled
to Canada, where I suppose he lives.....he now lives.....he may be
dead now, he was a Bathgate man, and then I came back to Middleton
Hall again, and it wasn't long after that till my time was out. Now,..
.....when my time was out, work was slack and it was the old story,
you're out! And I was out! So, as most of the other apprentices
all got the out.....actually.....

GC They actually paid you off?

AM Well, really not.....I wouldn't go into the story about that...!
There's a wee story about that!

GC Well, tell me the story?

AM No! No! It's not that I'm afraid of anything like....they said that Mr. Morrison was a bully, pure and simple, and everybody knew that, they called him the Bull! And he had a wee bull nose....Morris, as his ready quick movements (inaudible) and he wasn't liked by nobody, however I didn't like him anyway, along with the rest, but being a boy, I never had much to do with him. However, when my time was out..... the rate at that time was one and sixpence an hour, manualand the improvers wage should have been one and twopence an hour.....now.....for nine months was the rule, you got nine months work to prove yourself and if you couldn't.....well, you were out anyway! But at least you got a wee break! However, I told my foreman, this Mr. Shepherd, I was kind of like the laddie that said, to the boss....."I'm twenty one the day, sir!" And he looked at me, and he said, "What do you want me to do, make you a dumpling!" You couldn't be like this with this guy, this old Shepherd, however, I told him, my time's out tomorrow, what happens next week? "Oh aye!", he says, "Well....." This was on the Friday, and he said "Well, I'll go over there and see the boss"....we worked six days in those days, well, five and a half, if you worked on the Saturday, the Saturday morning, and that was on the Friday, and on the Saturday morning, the old boy.....no.....on the Friday night, he went and seen the boss, Mr. Morrison, to tell him. He came back and he says, "Mr. Morrison says he is not going to give you any more than a shilling an hour!" I said, "Well, you go back and tell Mr. Morrison what to do with his shilling, for I'll not be taking it!" And his advice was "Now, just take it and calm yourself down, just take it and behave yourself.....you'll get on alright!" I said, "I'm not wanting it, if I can't get what I should get, keep it!" Now..... that was on the Friday night, I got home and I got a bigger row from my father and my father..... they weren't happy about it, but as I told them I wasn't going to be no snake at my work, for under money, but that didn't break with my father, he still didn't like it. However, on the Saturday morning, I went back up for my tools and the old foreman says, "I'll gang over again and

see the maister!" I said, "Don't bother yourself, I don't want toyou to see anybody!" "I've got all that I want, I'll get my tools and get to hell out of here!" So, that's what happened! But as I say, two months after that, they were hunting the country for jobs, you couldn't get jobs in 1927.....I was cycling as far as Falkirk looking for work, and I can mind of going into a housing scheme in Falkirk, and there were quite a drove of men coming marching out in twos or threes, you know, and I said, "Have you any idea where I would see the foreman joiner, here, man?" He said, "What way, are you a joiner?" "Aye!" "Looking for a job?" "Aye!" "You've no bl.....y chance in there, son!" "No way" "With that baby face!" "Look at us!" "Look at the faces we've got and they wouldn't give us a job!" "Och, you've no chance!" So, I thought, what was the use, I knew then that everything was kaput! So, I said, why cycle any further, I've been all round the area and away up into the Forth and this way and away very near to Caldercruix that way and Falkirk.....into Edinburgh, out and in to Edinburgh a hundred times! I went after a job in Edinburgh.....and there were six Broxburn fellas all looking for the same job, and they were all hiding in shop doors, not wanting the other boy to see them! But they must have all seen each other, because I saw them, and they must have seen me too! And I said, if there was one.....when the door was opened at nine o'clock, there were thirty! So, I never bothered going in! What chance had I.....with my time just out! That was a furniture firm that had advertised for a joiner! For six months work just! This was the rush.....you'll know that was in 1928, so.....I went home and I said to my mother... ."well, could you give me fifty pounds?" She said, "That's a lot of money!" I said "I know, but could you give me fifty?" "What would you do with it?" "I'm going to Canada!" "Oh, you're going to Canada!" "What are you going to do there!" "Well", I said, like anybody else I'll look for work!" "I'll surely get a job there!" She said, "Well, it might be like here, there's maybe no work!" However, I got the fifty pounds and maybe it broke her heart at the same time, but she gave me it....and I went to Canada, and I was two years in Canada, and I went

down.....because I had brothers and sisters in the States, and I had none in Canada, so I made it to Pittsburg, and I lived with one, and I got work there, with no bother! The steel mill, for two years there! But.....it was a twelve hour shift, which didn't suit me, I was a young man, and I wanted a bit fun.....I bought a motor car, and I could hardly ever get out in it! For the twelve hour shifts, it was murder! Sunday's, it was seven days a week! But good money! That's what I went after, that's how I was able to buy that car, you were getting good money, and this brother, had been in America before me, and he didn't have a car! Of course, he had a wife and a family to look after. However, I had another brother in Cleveland, Ohio, so I sent a wire to him asking if there was any work there, and a wire came back "Come right ahead, plenty of work!" And I was packed up the next day, and I set off for Cleveland, and I landed in Cleveland and it was a lovely town, I liked Cleveland very much! And I worked there for a while, and I got into Ford's, well, it was the winter time, and there wasn't much chance of joiner work, outside, so I took anything! Ford's wasn't joiner work, but.....I got three months repairing furniture.....when he knew I was a joiner like, he said, we don't hire joiners.....everything in here is metal, and so it was! Every shelf, everything, doors, everything that you touched, was all made of metal! He said, "But..... there are two or three bits of furniture in each shop that are needing repaired, could you do that?" "Oh", I said, "I can do that!" So, I landed for about four months there, varnishing and sorting the bottoms of the chairs..... that was quite a good job, it only lasted....and then he offered me a job on the paint line, polishing cars.....which was quite a hard job, which gave me muscles that I never had before! I was on the rubbing and in those days, you rubbed the colour up, and by God, it was hard work! However, you got used to it, no bother! Then, I left there, and I went to.....och, I was the whole Winter there.....and I got out into the schemes..... the buildings and I was a year and a half there.....I was still in Cleveland, and I left there and went to a sister that I had in Detroit, and I worked there, just jumping from one job to the other and there wasn't anything that was going to keep you a long time, but there was always plenty

of it, jumping from one job to the other.....and then I left there and went to another sister and.....in a place called Clinton, Iowa, which was miles and miles away. In fact, she died two or three years ago, and I left there, and I came back to Cleveland....my first love.....I liked it, and by this time..... the work was down to two days a week in Cleveland.....it didn't matter where you were, you were lucky if you got two days a week, so I got.....so, as I said..... two days a week was the darg, or so I thought to myself, I'm only living on that, I could go home to the old country and live on that too! So..... there were three..... two chaps and myself were friendly and.....we had a bit of money, and we had made up our mind that we were going to California, and at least we would have got the sunshine there, if we couldn't get anything else! But, on second thoughts, I said, well, I don't know, if I'm going to spend any money, I'm going to spend it going back to the old country! And the three of us came back! And we came back here and I was a fortnight home, I had a wee holiday, and weighing it all up, I thoughtmaybe I would have been better staying where I was, but however, I'm here.....I'll make the best of it, so I thought...nowI'll try Middleton Hall, and just see what they are made of! And I went back to Middleton Hall, and I said.....when I went there, the lady in reception..... told me that Mr. Crichton who was ManagerGeneral Manager now.....

GC What year are you in now?

AM Eh.....19.....

GC 1935!

AM Mr. Crichton was down.....had now filled Mr. Brysons place! He was the former General Manager, and she said, would Mr. Crichton's private secretary do? I said, well, anybody that I can talk to, and as it turned out, it was a Mr. James Brown, a very nice gentleman, he was, and he asked me what I was, who I was, and then he remembered that

he knew me, "You served you're time here!" I said, "That's right!" "Oh well", he said, and that he would see Mr. Crichton when he came in. So, eventually Mr. Crichton came in and I was sent over..."Oh, come in, Alec, sit down!" Mr. Brown must have told him my name was Alec..... "Sit down" So, I thought that things looked good, if he told me to sit down! So, we had a wee crack about America and about Scotland, and about the two day week over there, and he could tell me that that was funny, they were working three weeks on and one off here! Which was tantamount! So.....he said, "Well, we have a job in the acidworks in Broxburn, if you are not scared to dirty your hands!" I said, "No, I'm not scared to dirty my hands, or my overalls, either!" He said, "Oh, you'll get a pair of overalls, because there are some things that get acid on.....this was at the acidworks at Broxburn.....so, that was the first job that I started and I actually got two years there, and I was quite happy to be laid off, because the work wasn't there.....I was back on to the houses repairs and the work just wasn't there, there were enough men to do the house work, there were another three, by me, had all been taken on, and we had been spread out, but now..... things were spinning down, and Mr. Onslow, the foreman architect then.....came and apologised because of being laid off, and they couldn't do anything about it, so, from there, I got on to the housing schemes, and then I went through to Glasgow to work.....so this brought us up then..... to 1939 and.....but.....the year previous, which I've missed telling you, the year previous, I married a Pumpherston girl, and we went through to live in Glasgow, where I was working, but, as the war broke out, she lost the head and wanted back to the village of Pumpherston or Broxburn, anywhere bar Glasgow! So, at that time, I was working with a firm who were doing Government work, and I was all over the countryside, and I had to go into lodgings, so she was left on her own! So, she packed up and got the furniture and everything through to Broxburn, and that was the end of the Glasgow episode! So, I came back here.....and I came up to Middleton Hall, and asked were they needing anybody? By this time, the war had started, oh, maybe three months or so, and at Middleton Hall, they had said that

there was a job vacant with the Mine Department, would I take that? So, I said yes, I'll take a job with the Mine Department! And I was seconded to Mr. Keddie, the Manager at Whitequarries, and he was a proper gentleman, and I worked there with another joiner, who was in charge of the place and.....a Mr. Andrew.....I can't mind what you called him.....it doesn't really matter, I've forgot his name, between the two of us, we constructed the new scaffolding, new engine rooms, new workshops.....and the site at Whitequarries. Then, while I was still employed there, the now.....mining agent, Mr. John Colvillearrived and asked Mr. Keddie, could he spare me to go to the Roman Camps, and Mr. Keddie said, well, he would have to see Andrew the man.....I can't mind his name.....and he came to see him and he said 'Oh no, I need him for a while yet!' That was three times that he put that off, and he wouldn't let me go! However, at the end, he said 'Alec, I'll have to let you go this time!' Mr. Colville is still shouting! This way, I was transferred to the Roman Camps. Now, the Roman Camps was my actual first touch with the mines.....it was No. 6 Mine, which was near the.....maybe about five hundred yards from the Roman Camps Oilworks.....then it was No. 4 Mine, I think that was it, but I'm not sure! At Roman Camps,up in the fields.... No. 7, No. 6. That was up in the fields.....so between the two mines, they had quite a bit of work for me! As the joiner that had been on the job, he had been called up to the Army, and the worker lay by (inaudible). From there..... that's the daughter going to wash the windows..... the experience then was.....going down a mine when needed, to repair..... the doors.....huge six foot square doors across the two sets of rails, which were bound with metal bindings, shaped in a semi circle.....on both sides.....on one side.....and an old.... a weight on the other side.....and when the hutch came along and struck it, it didn't bash the door but it opened it through the striking of this metal and the weight carried the door back right through, and when it went through it just fell back itself.....so we had that to do and then we had airlocks to build at the top of the mine.....doors here and doors there, called airlocks. For the never ending rope that went down the mine.....and then the engine houses to

repair and what not. And.....really, I didn't know much about the mine, actually, the actual workings, I'd been down and seen it like, saw the men firing the shots.....

GC And what was your.....what did you feel about going down the mines? Had you any feelings or.....?

AM No, it didn't worry me, no!

GC It didn't bother you?

AM I had been down the mine when I was a wee laddie with my father. Walked down, my father was a mine fireman, at Broxburn and he also fed the ponies on a Sunday morning, so that was my trip down the mine on a Sunday morning. I wasn't scared of going down in the dark, or anything like that.....oh, this was a modern mine, you had lights everywhere and plenty of height to walk in, but an odd time, you had to go well away in maybe to put the air hoses in to help.....put the air hoses in, and when you were in there you found the actual miner working at the face, and knowing that I hadn't seen anything about this, they showed me, how the holes were bored and how the explosive was put in, the gelignite, how it was tapped in with a copper damper which I had put a shaft in, for many of them, a big long seven foot shaft (inaudible) their way in, this.....it was..... then we all retreated when they were lit, to a safety bit and stood back till we heard the bang, and we counted the bangs and we knew how many had went off, we knew how many had been set, and that was my only experience of that.....mining. As far as.....

END OF TAPE

AM SIDE TWO

AM Now, a job that occasionally turned up in the mine, was the hanging of doors, airlock doors, which mostly consisted of a double clad door, made by six inch by inch boarding, nailed together, and criss crossed on the opposite sides, to form a double door. Then, huge four feet by three inch or four inch hinges, were attached to it, three of them, one top, one middle, one bottom, then there was an iron bar went across the door on both sides, front and back, bolted through to a to a shaped bar on the opposite side, the side..... the opening side, or closing side! Now, when the hatches came along and a man was pushing them or the diesel engine was pushing them, the man didn't have to come along and open the door, because he struck this semi circle iron bar that was fixed to the middle of the door, and glanced off it, and pushed the door in front, thus leaving the door wide open and the hatches went through, and the door stayed where it was with the aid of a heavy weight, that had been back balanced, until the man came through with the diesel engine, and the door returned to its former position. Thus closing off the air to a certain extent, not altogether, but practically. Then, to hold these doors up, you had to have a lintel, placed at maybe six feet six from the rails in height, and two strong upstanding standards, which run out about twelve by eights, heavy timber, heavy growing timber, home grown timber, maybe beech, larch, something hard and heavy, that would last!

GC Was it always hard wood? That they used?

AM Well, they tried to get it anyway, they didn't always get it, but they tried, and the boarding, as I should have said, the six by an inch, was usually hard wood, it had been proved by the soft wood, that they didn't last, so they had to go in to the hard wood which was, in this case, second hand oak, which during the war, they couldn't get the real stuff, and many a heavy beam arrived at the mine, among old sleepers that the Company had bought from the railway companies, and it turned out that some of the sleepers were mahogany, beech, oak, and these were ones that were transferred from the railway squad to the mine department, and my job was to take them to the local sawmill, and saw them through and get them to suit myself, what I wanted, and that was how the doors became to be made.

GC Was this a private sawmill?

AM No! No!

GC It was the Company's own.....?

AM It was the Company's own sawmill! At the Roman Camps Works, which was..... taking it up in a hand cart and.....or the local horse and cart to the sawmill, where I pushed it through the saws and the labourers pulled it, loaded it and brought it back down to the mine, again. Then.....it.....it wasn't dressed in any way, this was all off the saw, which was good enough for down the mine, and then they were creosoted, to try and lengthen their life against dampness and this way..... that was one job that I done, then, there were passages that you could go into that.....were it wasn't suitable to put up a door and you put up a brattice cloth screen, made with brattice cloth, and you put it up, maybe four by four or three by three frames, and nailed on the brattice cloth, with brattice nails, which were coated, galvanised against the damp and this was very effective against letting the air through, because it became damp itself and kept everything back, but it wasn't very nice when you passed through

and it pushed against your face! However, the miners were used to that! Then.....at times, I was called to maybe help the oncost men to spread the huge hoses when they were transferring air from one duct through to another where the men were working, diverting it to them or away from whichever it was. That was another wee job that I done down the mine! Then, they even had a board down the mine with the numbers, discs on it, for each miner, each miner carried a wee brass disc like a penny, like an old fashioned penny with a hole in it, and there was a board put up on the top of the mine, at the air lock, and there was one that was put down the bottom of the mine, at the fireman's box. And when a miner went down, he took his number off the top, took it with him when he got to the bottom, he hung it up, thus letting the fireman know who was out and who wasn't! Who was down the mine and who wasn't! Then, at night when they all came up, if there wasn't the right number on the board, they knew who was missing! Who's number wasn't there, and where to go and look for them, so, well, I had the job of making the board, making a kind of decent design to it, taking it down and putting it on the wall, fixing it up somewhere where it was handy! But, then the back balance was a huge construction for the never ending rope, which..... the hutches were clipped on with a metal clip, and a huge handle and it crushed down and it.....clipped round and it held on to the rope, and this is.....

GC Did it grab it?

AM Aye, it was two clips about that length, shaped like that, and if you pushed the handle in, through the rope, pushed the handle down, and then it closed, holding the rope and the rope was pulling, and away went the hutch, to go up to the surface, on the pit head, and then this huge back balance with the wheel lying horizontally, burling round with the rope on it, and it went up and down and up and down as the weight was taken off or put on and the hutch was on it or off. You allowed it to go up to a certain distance, but you always brought it back to it's right bit! That.....only once in my memory did

that.....break away and burst, and that was a bit of feverish overtime to get that fixed up! I had to go and get another two joiners to come and give me a hand, there was quite a bit of work in it, and that was working with twelve by twelve batons, that's huge heavy batons, twelve foot long and twelve foot broad, and things like that, you know, to make up the big fence. However that was all that was your job, that.....you were maintenance and that was the kind of work that you done. But, during this time, when there wasn't much work to do in the mines.....well, I could have sat on my backside if I'd have liked, but I didn't prefer to do that! And I asked the Manager one day, Mr. Colville, one day, he asked me "Well, are you getting on alright, are you getting kept going?" I said, "Well, if they don't keep me going, I'll let you know!" And that's how it came to it, because I did let him know! And he said, "What would you like me to do?" I said, "Well, try and get some more work!" He says, "You know we usually find that they are not wanting work!" I said, "That might be, but I wasn't born that way!" "I was born to be able to work!" "And I want to work!" And I said, a week later, he came back and sent for me and he said, "Well, you wanted more work, well, I've been talking to Middleton, and there's plenty more work, we are going to designate all the Managers houses to you, to repair, during the war, during the war period!" "Well", I said, "That's better, because there is nothing doing here!" I got it, and that was what happened, and it was a break for me, because I was getting a better class of work, than I had in the mines. Now..... there isn't much more that I could tell you that actually went on in the mines, other than about the accident, maybe! Word came up, that there had been an accident down below, an explosion.....

GC Which mine was this?

AM This was No.6. Roman Camps!

GC Do you know what happened?

AM Aye! A young man.....a young married man with two children, Charlie

Hunter, was in the blow out, and another man from Broxburn, I don't know his name, well, I know it, but I can't remember it.....one was injured.....and we thought that both were injured. But by the time that the stretchers were taken in and the men had got up out of the mine, and I was one of them that helped carry him up to the baths, to have them attended to by the Doctor, and there was no move from the moment that they took him off the carriage, there wasn't a move from him, they carried him quietly up into the baths, and laid him down, and there was still not a move, and the Doctor came in and said he was dead. And it was a young.....a young Manager, by the name of Joe Hardy, who lived in Pumpherston, and Joe was unaccustomed to anything like that, happening like that under him, and he knew that I came from Pumpherston, and he came and asked me did I know where this young man lived, and I said, "Yes, I know his wife and I know his mother-in-law"; and he said, "Will you come with me, because I won't be able to tell her!" "You'll have to tell her!" Now.....that was a thing.....that I didn't want to do, any more than him! But with me being older than him, I thought, well, here goes! So, we came to Pumpherston, and we found that the girl wasn't in her own house, she was in her mothers, and we travelled up to her mothers, up here, andacross the road, what do you call it, across from the school there!

GC Oh, Letham Park?

AM Letham Park! And we went in, and we sat down for a minute or two, and the old man was in for his dinner, so was the son, and I nodded him out to the door and now....."We"re not here just for fun, we came to tell you something, but I can't tell your mother and sister and I can't tell your mother or your father, and I told him, and he said, "Come on in with me!", and we went in and we told them and it wasn't very nice, the mother being told, the lassie being told with her two children, that her man was dead. And that was the only experience that I had with anything like that, at the shale.....

GC Did you know why that accident happened?

AM Well, I would say, if I'm right, I might not be right, but I think that it was walking into a shot, going into it too quick, and a delayed shot going off when you were travelling in front of it, and that was that!

GC Can you remember, near enough, what year that was?

AM Oh.....no, I couldn't no.....(inaudible). Then, the war was finished and the word came that the mine had to be dismantled, and finished, and I was on the job of dismantling it, and taking everything down, the engineers, the fitters and myself, and it was almost completed, I was transferred to the Oilworks, to help to dismantle it, not long

GC Which Oilworks were these?

AM The Roman Camps Oilworks! Which was just up the road, about a hundred yards (inaudible) there were two mines that had to be dismantled and then there was the Oilworks. Then, I got quite a nice job, the dismantling of Oakbank Village. I was sent up there with a squad of ex miners, from the West Calder area, who had all lost their jobs at Westwood and so on, and I said that was my next job, seeing the dismantling of the whole village, except one block, and I understand that it's down now, too, so, that was the end of Oakbank! And I was seconded by a Manager, by the name of Mr. Blythwoods, who was at Westwood then, who had been in Pumpherston, but who was now in Westwood, and as I was under him in Oakbank, he came and told....he thanked the men for doing a good job, and he thanked me for giving him the first dismantling job of the Scottish Oils that paid, and so I said, and so I said, that was a wee feather in my cap! I saw that it paid! Then, he said to me, "Now, you'll understand Mr. Colville says you'll turn up on Monday at Middleton Hall!" I said, "That's where I was transferred from, and I'd been there until Middleton Hall went down, and as there was no work, that wee bit workshop that was going to be left was part of an old building at Pumpherston Work that was taken over by Middleton joiners.....Mr. Wullie Roberts...

he was the foreman, and a lad that had been with him to serve his time in.....was still with him, who was deservedly next man to get a job, and I said that I was the last man in....in....and first man out! Which was quite alright! And I was laid off with a number ofit would be about six plasterers, bricklayers, labourers, plumbers and myself. And from there, it was the end of my sojourn with the Scottish Oils, other than to maybe tell you that I also had the misfortune to have a brother killed in Westwood Pit, in 19..... 19.....the first year that it was open. He had served in the war from 1914 to 1918, and there was a scheme came out, whereby, if you were a miner of coal or shale you could get off the soldiering, and my mother thought that she was doing a good thing, getting the laddie home, sent away the papers and he got sent home. Three months living with us, and three months married.....working in this new pit.... Westwood.....and a stone a ton in weight fell on top of him! Dead!

GC From the roof?

AM From the roof, aye! He shouted for his mate to run, and he was running, but the mate got out and he didn't! Oh, that was.....

GC Was there any compensation or anything?

AM Aye! Four hundred pounds!

GC How many?

AM Four hundred pounds! I don't know if there was anything for the wee girl, well, there wouldn't be, because the baby was born posthumously, he was dead when the baby was born.....but as far as we knew, that was what my sister-in-law got, £400, she would get nothing for the bairn at all, I wouldn't think, because it wasn't born! That was the end of my experience with.....

GC So, that was you then, finished with the Scottish Oils! And did you

retire then?

AM No! I went from there to the County Council in Broxburn, and I left Middleton on the Friday and started with the Council on the Monday. I didn't believe in losing jobs! And I was there until I was sixtythree.....and I had an altercation with one of the bosses and I told him where to put his job! As I'd worked in many better places! And I left there and I went to work with a firm in Broxburn, a new firm on the new estate.....putting furniture together..... this modern furniture....and I was there until I retired. That was that!.....

END OF TAPE

Transcript

AM

I left school at fourteen years old in Easter, 1923.

Industrial Information

I got a letter from Middleton Hall, where I had previously placed my name in search of a job as an apprentice. I had to go and see Mr. Morrison who was the chief architect for Scottish Oils at Middleton Hall. After seeing him I had to go and see the foreman

joiner Mr. Shephard, who told me to start on the Monday as an apprentice joiner, where I was left with all the nicky-nacky jobs for incoming tenants.

Roman Camps

From there I went to Roman Camps with the same man Mr. Meikle to erect small bathrooms at the miners rows.

I was also replacing windows and putting in the boring for concrete roofs and coal house doors and converting old dustbins.

Holygate

I then went to Holygate which was something similar to the Roman Camps. It was terraced houses and they didn't have bathrooms or toilets.

I also had to erect porches in the front of the houses similar to the style in Pumpherston and Broxburn, which included a toilet and sink and a new innovation to the Scottish Oils, a bath. This however didn't prove very successful.

Baths

Baths were also put into the houses as well. A wooden beam was put along the top of the building which carried a huge rubber apron or curtain to fix up to the door, which formed a whole wall behind the bath. This was to screen whoever got into the bath.

Hot Water

There was no hot water and the miners in these houses had to use cold water.

Gas System

They then discovered that due to a lack of hot water system in the houses they weren't satisfactory.

Gas hot water systems were then introduced to the houses in Broxburn, which was used to heat the water.

Boiler

There was a copper boiler with an

angled iron up in the corner wall with the boiler sitting on this above the bath which was very dangerous. The gas pipe from the main outside only heated enough water to was your feet. So you would sit and wash your feet and wait until the next drop of water was ready to wash the rest.

Lids for Baths

There was lids made for the baths which were made from flooring with a hook under the rim of the bar, and the people were told not to use them. Forty eight families in the Holygate community were in these houses and some of the families used the baths as coal bins and one or two were using them as cycle stores. Eventually some of the families took the baths out of the houses.

Repairs to Houses

I also did repairs to barns as well as houses. On the houses I repaired the windows, doors, roofs, floors and anything connected with the woodwork or glazing. I could be sent anywhere that had Scottish Oil houses. I was still serving my apprenticeship when I was doing repairs to these houses.

Tarbrax

I had also to go and strip doors and windows from some of the houses that had been vacated in Tarbrax and get them into the van at night to bring them back down to Woolfords and the next day we repaired the houses in Woolfords.

Grangemouth

I then went to Grangemouth where I was on a big building that they were putting up there.

Bothwell Road

From there I went through to Bothwell

Hamilton	<p>Road in Hamilton where I built a big garage for A. & D. Fraser. The garage ran from the main road right into the racecourse, and we could see the races for nothing.</p> <p>I left Bothwell Road Hamilton after a disagreement with Mr. Morrison, who was a pure bully.</p>
Canada	<p>I left the United Kingdom and went over to Canada where I worked in Detroit and I was there for two years.</p>
Returned to the United Kingdom	<p>In 1935 I returned to the United Kingdom from Canada and I went back to Scottish Oils to see a Mr. James Brown.</p> <p>Eventually Mr. Crichton came in and sent me over to the plant.</p>
Acid Works Broxburn	<p>They had a job at the acid plant at Broxburn which they said I could have if I wasn't scared to dirty my hands or my overalls.</p> <p>That was the first job I got when I came back from Canada and I stuck it out for two years and I was quite happy to be laid off after that because the work wasn't there.</p>
House Repairs	<p>I went back onto house repairs again but even there things were spinning down as well, so I was laid off again.</p>
Glasgow	<p>From there I went through to Glasgow where I worked with a firm doing Government work, and I was all over the countryside.</p>
Middleton Hall	<p>I went from Glasgow to Middleton Hall and asked if they needed anybody. They said that they had a vacancy in the Mine Department which I took.</p> <p>I was second to Mr. Keddie, the Manager</p>

at Whitequarries.

I worked with another joiner, and between us, we constructed the new scaffolding, new engine rooms and workshops.

While I was there the mining agent, Mr. John Colville, arrived and asked Mr. Keddie if he could spare me to go to Roman Camps. This was my first touch with the mines.

Roman Camps

I started work in Roman Camps No. 6 mine which was about five hundred yards from the Roman Camps Oilworks. I worked between No. 4, No. 6 and No. 7 mines.

I also had to go down the mines when there were door repairs to do.

These were big six foot square doors across two sets of rails, which had metal bindings shaped in a semi circle on one side and a weight on the other side. When the hutch came along and struck it, it opened the door instead of bashing it. The weight carried the door right back through and it fell back itself again.

Airlocks

We had to build airlocks on top of the mine for the never ending rope that went down the mine.

Engine House

I also had the engine house to repair but I know much about the actual mine workings itself.

Down The Mine

I had been down the mine when I was a wee laddie. My father was a mine fireman at Broxburn so that was my trip on a Sunday morning.

I was not scared of the dark down the mine because it was a modern mine and there was light everywhere and plenty

of height to walk in.

Drilling Holes
and Explosives

They showed me how the holes were bored and how explosives were put into the holes. This was tapped with a copper damper which I had put a shaft in to make it longer.

We then retreated to safety until we heard the bangs, which we counted so that we knew they had all gone off.

Pit Ponies

My father also fed the pit ponies on a Sunday morning when he went down the mine as well.

That was the only experience I had down the mines.

Accidents

There was an accident at No. 6 mine Roman. I can't remember the chap's name who we thought was injured, but by the time the stretchers were taken down the mine, the men who had been injured had been helped out of the mine to the baths. They were then seen by the Doctor.

There was no movement from the moment that he was taken off the carriage.

The doctor then came in and said that the man was dead.

Closure of Oilworks

I got quite a nice job dismantling Oakbank Village and Oilworks.

I was sent up there with a squad of ex miners from the West Calder area who had all lost their jobs at Westwood.

I said that was my next job seeing the dismantling of the whole village except one block.

Middleton Hall

From there I went to Middleton Hall to start dismantling it.

County Council

From Middleton Hall I went to the Council

on the Monday where I started in another job and I was there until I was sixty five.

Wages

When my time was out the rate of pay was one and sixpence an hour. The improvers wage was one and twopence an hour for nine months, because you got nine months to prove yourself.

Domestic Life – Marriage

I married a Pumpherston girl.

Baths

Before we got hot water in the houses we had to use tin baths with cold water in front of the fire. We were frozen to death trying to wash in cold water.

Housing

When I was an apprentice I had to go into lodgings.
No other domestic life listed in the script.

Social Life

No reference of social life in the script.

PLACE INDEX

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Caldercruix

California

Canada

Cleveland

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Detroit

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Forth

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Middleton Hall

Milnahaugh

Niddry Village

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Oakbank Village

Ohio

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Pumpherston
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