

AT TAPE ONE SIDE ONE

AM What was your first connection with the shale industry?

AT Well, I started in West Calder, we sunk Burngrange. We started to sink on the 3.5.1935.

AM Were you working with some contractors?

AT Yes. Jock McCallum, he was the contractor, and my father, he was a 12 hour foreman, worked from six in the morning to six at night. And the number two pit struck the shale on 25.10.1935.

AM That was pretty quick.

AT Well, it was done in good time, I mean it definitely was. And I mean, as that contractor says, the oil company got a bargain, because actually we were working with what we called backskins on, you know, the water was dropping on top of you all the time, and not only that - when you jumped off this kettle, a thing like a barrow, and you jumped down into the cold water, and you were in sometimes to about your waist, and that was winter time, so you'll have a good idea what it was like!

AM How many men would be involved in that roughly? In the sinking?

AT Now wait a minute. One shift would be - there would be about 24 men on the three shifts altogether. You see, we did the brickwork and everything. That was one of the things that I was very inquisitive about, how the damn you built bricks down the way you see, but my dad explained it to me and how you sunk - you sunk your shaft so far then you got these wooden segments, and you laid them round the circle of the shaft, and you laid them level, then you had a plumb in the centre of the shaft

and then you had plumbs at the side, and you started your brickwork off these three wooden segments, and you came right up to what height you had to go. But you always built in solid, and as you know when you're sinking a shaft it's not like - it's not smooth like a tumbler, there's hallows here and hallows there, well when you build it in solid that takes a bite so that the brickwork hangs there, once you take away the support again. So we sunk them so far and then they drilled holes in the side, maybe as many as needed and then they put iron bars in these holes, then they rested these wooden segments up to the height you see, and it was how you bricked a shaft down the way.

AM You would meet quite a lot of snags even although you had a good time, you would meet quite a number of snags?

AT Well, yes, the - sometimes the shift that was on before you - you see there is a theory that you take out the core - when you're sinking you take the core out, that's what we called sumpers, when that's out and filled and away, you take down the sides and that brings the shaft out to its right size. You see, we called it sumpers, it was just like taking out a core, it didn't always come out like that, but that was the idea. Well sometimes the shots didn't go just as you would like them to go, with the result that it gave the following shift a lot of extra work. Well, it wasn't the men to blame, it was maybe just on to the strata of the rock.

AM And once you struck shale in October was there much work to be done after that?

AT Well, the pit bottom was all to be bricked, well, we didn't do it, we left shortly after that. We came to Burngrange - to Roman Camps, and the company's brickies took over from there.

AM Right. So you left, you reckon, about the February of the next year, 1936. You said that earlier. What about gas, did you have any problems with gas?

AT Well, we worked with the naked light at first, and of course I was young then and strong, and we were boring what we termed sumpers, that is, boring to take this core out, and me being young and strong I was leading, my drill was further down than any of the rest if you know what I mean, and then this report like a rifle blast, and it showered the borings that was in hole up and I caught it on the arm and then there was a jet of flame came up. Well I'd never seen gas lit in my life before and of course the gas got up inside this thing we were holding, what we called our backskin, and of course it got lit up as well, and what flashed through my mind at that time, I'd heard the saying, "in hell roasting", well, that's what I thought was going to happen to us, in hell roasting, because there was flame all round about. Now those old sinkers didn't get excited one little bit. Just, "Aye." And they took their backskins off these rubber sheets and they battered the flames out. And there was only this jet of flame coming out of this hole that I had made, and my father put us out to the surface and we had to get electric lamps after that, no more naked light. But it was comical when you were bricking or maybe idling away time, ken, you could hear this sssssssss, the boys with their pipes. Although they had electric lamps in they aye had their smoke. They'd light this at the side - you see this wee jet of flame would come out of the side of the rock. But it never got time to accumulate because it just went up the shaft you see, there was nothing to stop it from going up. But it was comical, these wee jets of flame round.....

AM Well, you must have made a good job at Burngrange because you moved on from there to sink no.6.

AT The Roman Camps, No. 6.

AM Roman Camps.

AT It was the same contractor, you see. McCallum, it was the same contractor, although he left when the Roman Camps mine wasn't

so far down. There was some - there was a disagreement somewhere in the contract and the company carried on on their own. Because there was just the leading men such as my father, and Jock Wardrop and big Jimmy Potter, and men like that, they were put in - they were in charge of that shift.

AM You said earlier that you started at No. 6 in April 1936.
Was No. 7 mine being sunk around.....

AT At the same time.

AM At the same time.

AT That is up the back of the Camps tip. It was a steeper mine but it wasn't as deep. But it was a wet mine just the same. But it was a better quality of shale that was coming out of number 7. Aye, number 7. What - the shale that we got out of number six hadn't the quality that they were expecting. See I think that they were looking for shale something like the Dunnet or the Broxburn, I don't know what damned shale they struck but the old shale miners when they got it, they were paring it with their knives. Well, good shale should pare like a candle. Well, see, that wasn't paring like a candle. The wax wasn't in it, the oil wasn't in it, and

AM And were you employed by the contractor rather than the oil company at that time?

AT Oh no. I was employed by the contractor when he was there, when the contractor left then we were automatically working for the company.

AM And can you recall what kind of wage you were getting at that time?

AT Well at that time we thought it a fair wage, about £2.10/-.
That was a fair wage then. That was £2.50p.

AM Right. And that was in 1936. So did you meet many snags in Roman Camps compared to Burngrange which was a pit? And No. 6 Roman Camps was of course a mine. Was there a great deal of difference in the sinking?

AT Oh aye. When we were sinking Burngrange, the men that were sinking Burngrange knew their stuff. When they were sinking Roman Camps mines once the contractors left it was left to the shale miners. Now the shale miner only worked with powder which is different from "jelly". And they couldn't judge a shot the same. They had the belief that, ram a hole full of jelly and it is bound to come out, which is not the case. Which - fairly often, when you'd done a stretch and it say got bricked at the weekend, and the shift came out on the Monday morning, well if the boy didn't know his stuff very often that brick blew down from the blast. There was too much jelly being used. That happened very, very often.

AM And I suppose that the depth you went down would be far, far greater at Burngrange than at No. 6?

AT In vertical depth? Oh, aye, and in length and all. In Roman Camps mines, I think, now I'm not very sure about this, I think it was about a mile and a quarter. And there was a gradient of 1:3. That was the gradient in Roman Camps mines. For the lack of knowledge there was a lot of extra expense in there, in work in there, Davie Caldwell was the under-manager at the time. Now Davie Caldwell was a coal man, he wasn't a shale man, and he was a young man and didn't know very much about mining. Anyway my father told him. He said, "Look, Davie" he said. "I've got this place as I want it today," he said,, "I'll show you how a thing should be done." Well, my father bored what we called the bursting shots, and it did come out just like a big wedge.. My father

took Davie Caldwell. "Now" he said, "That's how it should be." he said. "I knew I could do that." he said. "I don't know if your other men would have done." he said. "These shots were weighted so as just to bring that out. Now, if I bore side shots and tops, that's it ready". And Davie was quite pleased. He said, "It's a pity we couldn't do that every time". Well, you can't do that every time because sometimes when you - the boys that are finishing the shift, they leave what you would call - bits sticking out on the road, bits that have got to come off, you've got to bore a hole to blow it off, and all that time and.....well, if it had been done right at the beginning it wouldn't be that. Now, when - I had a very narrow escape at Roman Camps. We had just blew a shot out and we wanted to come in with toppings and we were working away, there was me, and Dougie Boyle, and Johnny Moonie, who else was there..... anyway, you ken after the shots my father was in dabbing the roof like this and he said to me, "Clear out" and I just stepped back that wee bit and there was a great big stone about three feet thick and six feet round blew up like a solid block at my back, and with it dropping it lifted this back-skin that I had on, ken, you had on a.....it lifted it up. If I had been a yard further back I'd been crushed under it. It was just my father tapped and he heard the sound and he said, "Clear out". I wasn't long in clearing out'. Aye, That was one narrow escape I had there. You see, we had pumps that - they were turbine pumps but they could draw air, what we term could snore, and it was a Saturday afternoon, we come out and the pump had got clogged, see there was no pumper, they were just left there to shift theirself, and it had got clogged up with mud and it wasn't pumping, of course, it couldn't pump, and the water was away up, and big McDonald, he said, "Who am I going to get to volunteer to go in and clear that?" Johnny Mooney, he went in and - birthday suit - he went in, lifted it and cleared it. Big McDonald, he said, "Up to the top" he said, "That's you for

the rest of the shift". Johnny went up to the surface of course somebody had to do it. Johnny did it. These pumps, they were great pumps but that was the only snag. With you working it the water was always dirty, there was always silt forming you see. When we came to the bottom when we finished sinking the mine, we were at the bottom and we wanted to make a sump for the water, we struck a stuff like china, but it was like red whin, but it sounded like china like glass, and it was as hard as glass. But we couldn't get the drills to stand up to it. But my father had wee hand jumpers, I don't know if you know what a jumper is or not, it is like a chisel you know, and I got them, and there was me, and Bobby Miller from Uphall Station, we were put on constant night-shift and that was our job. Well you could only hammer away for about an hour and you were only in about 9" or something, the secret was placing those holes. Well Bobby aye came to me and asked where he should put the holes, well, it being like china, my God you got what you put in; Oh aye you never lost none yet - cut clean and we were on that for a good two or three weeks. But what amazed - you could cut your hand with it very easy, it was like glass, it was red and hard like china, I don't know what you'd call it. But anyway we drove through, extended the mine if you like a bit further for to make a lodgement for water. And that's what it was. I've looked for that stone in the museum but couldn't see it. It was just like whin but harder than whin and rattled like china. Now it would be about maybe four feet thick. You couldn't drill it. Maybe, the present day, they might have material that might stand up to it better now, tungsten steel and all that, but at that time, we hadn't the drills to stand up to it. We just had these wee jumpers, and we had to depend on the blacksmith tempering them for you.

AM But you never encountered that at Burngrange, only at.....

AT No, no, just at the Roman Camps. No, we never encountered

nothing exceptionally hard at Burngrange.

AM After you sank no. 6 at Roman Camps, where did you continue on the shale?

AT Well as I told you I took appendicitis, and my next job was at Pumpherston here. At the engineer's.

AM You had a spell at drawing?

AT Oh aye, I was finished the sinking, I was at the drawing, till I took this appendicitis and then I couldn't go back to that work, that was heavy work, and then was idle for a few months and I got a start then in Pumpherston until I was called up in 1941. And then I was released in - 1942 was it?

AM Yes, and then you went to Whitequarries?

AT Whitequarries, aye.

AM Well, how would you compare Whitequarries to Roman Camps, was it a good mine?

AT Oh yes, it was a good mine, good quality shale. But the method of mining was antediluvian, I think that's why Burns didn't like the job, I mean, I seen where there was room for improving. But the quality of shale was good.

AM What were you doing at Whitequarries?

AT Well, I started away with - I was giving Bobby Duffy a hand in an air course and he wanted a mine driven up for air so we were at that when I was just being made use of and Burns told me that either I carry on or finish up, so I finished up.

AM Of course if you finish up the alternative was to go back to the forces?

AT To the army, oh aye. I told Burns that, I said," It doesn't frighten me". Oh no, not only that, this mine, up the way was very steep. It was about 1:2 ½ or something, you could hardly stand in it, and it wasn't an easy job boring it, right enough, the boy, he held the machine on his shoulder, and he was at the back pushing it, and both of you were getting the borings and the dust if you like. But no, it wasn't a nice job, definitely not. But the quality of shale at Whitequarries was good shale. Oh yes, I don't know shale that was at Whitequarries but it was - the yield was good off it though.

AM And then you re-joined the forces and the army and you were to see quite a bit of service abroad? Before you came back

AT Oh yes, that was one of the - I toured up and down England a bit, doing jobs here and doing jobs there and I quite enjoyed army life as long as I was travelling and working. But when I was stationed at say, Chester Castle, we were like toy soldier, I mean, you'd to parade every day, morning and night, you'd to appear like a Burton's model which was - instead of getting practical soldiering, you were being made a fool of, that's all I can say. But anyway I did enjoy it when we went and done jobs for the A.R.P. and things like that. We went and put in telephones for them and things like that. I enjoyed that work.

AM And then you were to become a linesman abroad as well when you went to Belgium and.....

AT Oh aye, I was a C 2 linesman you see, and I was made responsible for the lines from Calais to Boulogne. That was my run, from Calais to Boulogne. I was responsible for the lines there. And I was only myself. The good thing about that was I'd no bosses or nothing, all I did was rose in the morning, got

my breakfast along with the R.A.F. and got my bike though I very seldom cycled. I cycled from Boulogne to Calais and Calais to Boulogne, and I just stopped now and then just to see that the lines were all right, and test points now and again, I would check in at the test points. Phone one way and phone the other just to see that they were all right. But that was O.K. Then I was recalled back to the - at that time they were in - I was called back to Wimbledon and another boy and I was sent on advance party to Brussels to take over from the fourth Air Formation Signals. But it was all quite exciting, but one of the things I'll never forget was while we were at Wimbledon there was a - they had to do a line across the road, telephone wires had to cross the road, now there was a tank went along there every twenty minutes, it was cobblestones, now it should have been a sergeant's job to have stood there and got a man on each side and said, "Right, up" and the sergeant said, "You'll manage it, son". I knew I would, I mean, and it was us that put it up. But I thought, "Blooming...." Well, that's the sort of things that I done, well, it wasn't fair. Another thing, while we were at Wimbledon there was a.....see that Jimmy Edwards, a boy like that, Flight Commander Gommo, well there had been a fault in his phone. Sent out a linesman to sort it, then somebody else. Well I think there were three or four had been at it, even the corporal had been at it, and still wasn't getting results, the sergeant was at it, and by this time Gommo had got an awful name because he was like Jimmy Edwards, I had never seen him before but I had got told about him, and a voice like a bloody foghorn - we got our.... so I went out and reporting and all this, so I tried his phone, then I took his phone off and put my own phone on, see you had to carry with you what you termed a linesman's telephone. So I went out to the first test point. Well I didn't test back to him, I wasn't wanting him to answer the phone, I went on to the exchange, well I knew the fault was still between me and the

exchange, it was bound to be O.K. between me and him. Going along here the cable came down the roof and went over the edge and it had been raining and there it's chafed. And so it was. The wire was naked and with the rain, of course it was shorting there. So I did all the..taped it up, then I went back to a test point, I rung the exchange, O.K. I rung him, O.K. So when I went back I went in and said, "Well, your line all right then, sir?" "Yes" he said, "It's O.K. now. What did you do with it?" I told him, like, there was a short somewhere. "Bloody man" he said, "Sergeants seen it, corporals seen it, what do they call you?" I said, "Taylor, sir". "Right" he said, "Next time, we'll send for Taylor". But he was just like Jimmy Edwards. Big and.....but it was great that I done it.

AM Yes. Then you had service in Egypt before you eventually got demobbed and came back to Pumpherston Oil Company, to Pumpherston Works. What did you start doing when you came back from the forces at Pumpherston?

AT I started where I left off. I started with Adam Scott. No, wait a minute.

AM In the garage?

AT No, oh no. I started back with Toby's squad then, and I was with Toby's squad and when wee Geordie - wee Geordie gets us in the he said, "I want you to" - ken Peter Studder, ken the plumber, he said, "Go with him" he said, "and you keep him right, you ken about the work and you keep him right. Go down and -" So I had to go down and see Adam Scott and I told him what Geordie Allan - GEORDIE ALLAN ! - what he'd said. "Oh aye" he said, "You've been round about the work a bit so you'll ken". So Peter Studder and I, we were the maintenance fitters for number 1 C.O.D. And I was there for a while. There was another thing that could have been a bad tragedy, Jimmy Quinn - was it Jimmy you called him? Quinn from down the road a bit,

ken, he had a wee piggery at the left hand side, you ken who I'm talking about. When the plant came on, you had to draw a spade so that the gas went through to the gas plant, well you couldn't draw that spade until a certain time. I had always been at him to keep good running bolts there, anyway to cut a long story short he was up changing the spade and he was sitting stride along the pipes like this right above the spade and I thought "He shouldn't be up there" and then I seen him going (pained breathing) so Geordie Smirrel came by. And I shouted on Geordie, and that Dougie Harper, ken who I'm talking about, Dougie went up, and Dougie went up the stairs, but I went up at the back of Quinn, Tammy Quinn it was, and held him - took him back off the gas like that, and that Dougie Harper got up, and he got a whiff of the gas and he fell right down, and Geordie Smirrel gripped that boy by the ankle like that, that's a fact.

AM How many feet had he to fall?

AT About twelve feet. Anyway we got Quinn down and Geordie Smirrel says, "Walk him up and down and walk him up and down". Me, myself, I was feeling not very great, so big Scott said, "Away the two of you go for a walk down the mair and back" he said. "Away you go out of the road just now." Once we went away out the road a bit and got our lungs cleared of it, it cleared up a bit. But Quinn was off his work for a day or two but I was never off my work. But that was a near thing, definitely a near thing. And that - aye, Quinn was off his work for a good wee while, But that was one of the instances that I remembered there. I can mind, we were at the - this was before I went to the army - they had put a steam pipe across the railway, ken, high up, big (-) was working with us, and Mick aye had soft shoes on, rubber shoes or something, never had working boots on, never mind that, "Here the manager coming, here's the tiger!" Of course, as soon as he says that, Mick gets up and out on to the pipe in the middle, he was the boss.

AM He got off his mark that time!

AT The best of it was the "Tiger" didn't come down there, he was coming down the work but he didn't come down our way at all, but he went up here to be - he was on the job -

AM So, well, you worked with the blacksmith and handymen quite a long time at Pumpherston then?

AT Practically from the beginning, I was out with the C.O.D. When Sammy Scott - they were building the garage -

END OF SIDE ONE

Transcript	AT
Industrial Information	<p>I started in West Calder on the 3rd May. 1935 with Jock McCall on the contractors sinking the Burngrange Pit. These contractors really knew their stuff in the shaft sinking business.</p> <p>My father was the twelve hour foreman for McCallum's</p>
Shifts	<p>There was about twenty four men on the three shifts altogether.</p>
Brickwork	<p>We did the brickwork which was laid round the circle of the shaft, and they had to be laid level. We then had to plumb the centre of the shaft. The brickwork was started in segments of three, and you went up to the height you had to go. This brickwork had to be solid for shaft sinking. They then drilled holes in the sides and put iron bars in these holes, then they rested these wooden segments up to the height that was needed, this was how the the shaft was bricked down the way as well.</p>
Snags	<p>Sometimes the shift that was on before us had difficulty</p>

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It wasn't the men to blame,
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Naked Light We worked with a naked light at first.

Boring I was young and strong at
that time and we were boring
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my drill to go down further
than any of the rest of them.

Shale We struck shale in October,
but there was still a lot of
work to be done after that.

Pit Bottom The pit bottom had to be bricked
up, but we didn't do it. The
Company's brickies took over
from there.

Gas When I was at Burngrange I
have never seen gas like it
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to what we called our back-
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it lit up as well. What flashed through my mind at that time was, 'I have heard the saying, "in hell roasting," well that's what I thought was going to happen to us, because there was a flame all around you. Now these old sinkers didn't get excited one little bit. They just took their backskins off these rubber shirts and battered the flames out with them. And there was only a jet of flame coming out one hole that I had made. My father put us out to the surface and we had to get electric lamps after that. We were not allowed to use gas lamps after that.

Cigarettes

But although they now used electric lamps the miners still had to have their smoke.

Roman Camps

I moved from Burngrange to Roman Camps No. 6 Mine. It was the same contractor that was sinking No. 6 mine as the one I was working for at Burngrange, that was McCallum the contractor.

When we were sinking Burngrange the men knew their stuff.

The contractors left this job when the shaft wasn't far down and it was then left to the shale miners to carry on.

The shale miners only worked with powder which is different from 'jelly'. This meant that they couldn't judge the shot the same. They had the belief that if they rammed a hole full of jelly it was bound to come out, which was not the case. If the boy didn't know his stuff very often a brick blew down from the blast. This was because too much jelly was being used. Roman Camps mine was about a mile and a quarter, with a gradient of one in three. Due to the lack of knowledge there was a lot of extra expense. My father then told them that he would show them how it should be done. He bored what we called bursting shots which made it come out just like a big wedge.

The Shots

These shots were weighed, and if I bored side and top shots, that was it ready. You couldn't do that every-time because sometimes the boys that were finishing their shift left bits sticking out on the road. Then you had to bore a hole again and blow it off. If it had been done right at the beginning all this extra work wouldn't have to be done.

Drawing at Pumpherston When I finished shaft sinking I went to the drawing at Pumpherston, until I took appendicitis, and then couldn't go back to that work because it was heavy work. I was then idle for a few months and then I got a start in Pumpherston again and I was there until I was called up in 1941. I was released in 1942.

War

Whitequarries After I was released from the army in 1942 I went to Whitequarries. It was a good mine, with good quality shale, but the method of mining was antediluvian and there was room for improvement. When I started in Whitequarries I was giving Bobby Duffy a hand in an air course. He wanted a mine driven up for air. I found out that I was only being made use of and Burns told me that I either carry on or finish up, so I finished up.

Army

When I left Whitequarries I rejoined the forces and went abroad.

Linesman

When I returned from the forces I then went to Belgium where I was a C2 linesman.

Accidents

I had a narrow escape at Roman

Camps. We had just blew a shot out and we wanted to come in with the toppings. My father was in dabbing the roof and he said to me, 'clear out' and I just stepped back and there was a great big stone about three feet thick and six feet round blew up like a solid block on my back, and with it dropping it lifted this back-skin, and if I had been a yard further back I would have been crushed under it. I wasn't long in clearing out.

There was another thing that could have been a bad tragedy. Jimmy Quinn had a wee piggery and he got a whiff of gas from the pipes and he fell about twelve feet.

Wages

At that time I was getting what I thought was a fair wage.

Domestic Life

There is nothing about the domestic life in the script.

Social Life

There is nothing about the social life either.

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