

DM SIDE ONE

GC You left school when you were.....?

DM Fourteen!

GC Fourteen? And you started work.....?

DM I'd say in about March 1915, in Breich Pit!

GC Can you remember who the Manager was?

DM William Easton.

GC And what was your job there?

DM Pony driver in Breich Pit. Yes!

GC Can you remember much about what happened as a pony driver? What was your job?

DM Well, it was in about.....I had four faces to go to, to bring the shale hutches out to the loading point, you know, so it was quite interesting you know! Quite interesting!

GC And you had any problems with the ponies?

DM An odd time! A Sunday night would be a wee bit fresh and they would get away.....running about the different parts of the section, and you would feel a bit angry at them at the time, you know! Running around the place, you know! There was an odd time, a Sunday night, you know!

GC And how many ponies did you have? In Breich Pit?

DM In Breich Pit! I would say over twenty! There were two shifts going, you know! Dayshift and night!

GC And was there any one in particular that was your favourite? Any pony?

DM Pony?.....It would be Darkie, I think! It was a good little pony, you know! No trouble at all, bar an odd Sunday night! Yes, it was quite interesting!

GC Good! And how long did you.....how long did you spend in Breich, as a pony driver?

DM I would be there about two years and then I was transferred to Forty! Forty shale mine!

GC That's at Gavieside?

DM Gavieside, yes!

GC And were you still a pony driver there?

DM I was still a pony driver, there, yes! I'm talking about most of the time!

GC And how many ponies did they have at Gavieside?

DM Six! Six ponies!

GC And had you a favourite there as well?

DM Well, there were quite a few, but you know, but you bided in one section, until you got used to the different sections, you settled, until the chap gave it up.

GC And you had mentioned that you were also in a coal mine, that belonged to the Scottish Oils, or.....?

DM Well, when we were in Forty Nine, the retorts went on fire at Addiewell,

so some of the workers were transferred to West Mains coal mine, owned by the Scottish Oils, called Baads, Baads Colliery, and I spent quite a time pony driving there!

GC And was it a very similar job to the shale?

DM Similar! Much similar yes! The same as before....which was about five feet, then you had the roof, it was a limestone roof, so therefore we had to get the softest part for the pony to get down to the section, and we travelled from Twenty seven every night, down to Thirty Six, and the pony walked down a trench, so that gave it clearance without striking the roof, you know! It was quite a change, yes!

GC And would you say that it was a dirtier job, or not?

DM Well, knowing of course, you had the coal dust at times, sometimes it was much the same though, although the shale was much the cleaner, of the two, you know!

GC And how long were you a pony driver, that was Number Forty? In Gavieside. How long were you there?

DM I'd come up to Twenty Six in 1924, and there was all pipes, leading down all the pipes, and oilwork, and then transferred the ventilation and we put down all the pipes for the pumps etc., and then I went on the ponies then, and finished up on shift work as ostler, you know!

GC And that was in.....?

DM I would say about 1923 or '24!

GC And do you know who the Manager was then?

DM It was.....Alec Prentice! Alec Prentice was my Manager!

GC And who was the Manager within the coal mine when you were there?

DM John Niven,.....of the name of John Niven!

GC And do you know if the Scottish Oils had many coal mines at all, in the area?

DM One.....was Baads, Baads.....coal mine!

GC And then you went to.....where was it, you went to, which mine?

DM Twenty Six!

GC Twenty six?

DM I left there in 1924, and went out to New Zealand!

GC So, you were at Twenty Six when you went out to.....?

DM Out to New Zealand!

GC Yes, out to New Zealand! And what took you off to New Zealand?

DM Oh, just the travel, I had the thought to travel, you know, and experience!

GC What age would you be then?

DM Twenty four!

GC So, you wanted to see a bit of the world?

DM That was right, yes!

GC And had you any relations out there? In New Zealand?

DM Well, my mother's uncle and aunt left (inaudible) 1859, so I got in touch with them after I had been in New Zealand, a wee while, and met another friend who was Mine Manager, and we went to the coal mines on/ the Waikato coal mine.....

GC In New Zealand?

DM In New Zealand! Then I was mine foreman in New Zealand.....

GC Was it similar to the mining here?

DM The mining was much the same type of mining, stoop and room! Similar to the Scottish methods,yes!

GC And how did you favour there, did you prefer working in New Zealand.. or.....?

DM I liked it.....and I went across to Australia and worked in the coal mines there as a fireman. Upper Newcastle, New South Wales, and then I came back to New Zealand and I thought I would like a wee change and I joined the ships and went from Sydney to San Francisco. Previously I had been shipwrecked in New Zealand in 1929, on a passenger liner, so I wanted to have a bit of experience, you know! Get around!

GC So, you felt then that you were then getting it?

DM And I came back in 1935.

GC And where did you go there? When you came back?

DM The commencement of Burngrange, all the start of the surface work, for the pre-sinking, took on the sinking, and then pithead worker during the striking at Hermand. Then when they got the shafts completed into the shale seam, I went on to shaftsman, pit bottomer, shiftman, and I finished up in Forty Six as fireman, of course, previous to that I had done a wee bit of shift work in Hermand Coal Mine....shale mine.....

Hermand shale mine!

GC And at the sinking of Burngrange..... that's when Burngrange was just starting up, 1935?

DM It would be about 1938, when they started sinking operations, '38, or '39!

GC 1938?

DM It could have been 1938!

GC And did you find any problem in that job? Started up the sinking – the mine?

DM Not a great deal! We had sinking contractors.....were McCallums....so.. the Company sank it down and still they struck the rock, you know, the dirt and clay, and fireclay and all that! Then the sinkers came in..... the Company.....McCallums, contractors, and they took the sinking operations over!

GC And it was a private contractor?

DM A private contractor, two brothers! The McCallums!

GC Was it quite a big firm?

DM Yes, they had sunk one or two shafts in Scotland at one time! Yes!
It was quite interesting work, you know!

GC And what would you say was the most interesting thing about that job? The sinking?

DM Well, I thought it was when they completed the shaft, was putting the guides down, the rope guides and that was very interesting work! When you got them down and then Mr. Stein asked me if I would lay the rails on the pit head, that was all the rails on the pit head you know, on to conveyors to take the endless drives and the cage, so I did all that on

my own, did all that road laying on the pit head. You had a huge "V" came from the two cages, you know, and I would say that it would be about eight feet long, one of two..... largest "V"s, I've laid a road for, but the pithead work was very interesting, but anyway they introduced the diesel locos, and we got them down the shaft, we took two down the shaft

GC And was that a big job?

DM It was quite a big job! The scare was getting them on to the cage, because whenever you got the four wheels on to the cage, the cage started to dip then! So it was quite an interesting job getting them down the shaft, yes! That was diesel.....diesel locos. Yes!

GC You mentioned Mr. Stein. What was his job?

DM He was agent! He was Mine agent, for the Scottish Oils!

GC And who was the Manager at Burngrange?

DM Mr. John McArthur, J.B. McArthur.

GC And was there an under-manager? Or not?

DM Well, we had Dave Brown, he was under-manager then, and a wee while after that Twenty Six shale mine closed down and Mr. Irvine came. Sandy Irvine came, to Burngrange, and it was very interesting, you know!

GC And you said that you started.....well.....sinking the pit.....at Burngrange, and then you went on to.....you did a short time in Hermand, and.....you finished as a fireman.....

DM A fireman in Burngrange Pit!

GC And what was that job?

DM That was.....you went round before the commencement of the shift! And you examined all the working places, in your section, you know, for any methane or firedamp, and then you reported in a.....on a sheet, and it was usually posted on the pit head as well, that the air was good or conditions were good, so it was really a safety man, before the miners started work, you know!

GC And did you have any special training to become a fireman?

DM Well, I went to the mining class, you know, started them at.....I was asked if I would join the Mine Rescue Station and we trained in the Heriot Watt College in Edinburgh, so I qualified as a.....mine rescue..... member there, their team! And it was quite interesting work! Training under ground with the oxygen masks on, you know! It was quite interesting work!

GC Was there a mixture of coal and shale miners when you were at Heriot Watt, training, or was it all shale works?

DM Well, our two hours was usually all shale miners, we had seven members from West Calder, from Burngrange, and then you had Broxburn, all came on different days, you know, and that was in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh, yes!

GC And did you then get a certificate to say that you.....?

DM Aye.....a silver.....a silver badge, to say that you were an able-bodied member of the Fire Service, you know!

GC Were there any accidents.....during your spell with the pits and mines?

DM No! We had no callouts for the Brigades during my time!

GC Were there any accidents when you were working in any of these pits and mines, when you were there?

DM There were several.....miners injured.....and they eventually died, you know!

GC Can you remember anything about that?

DM Well, I can only remember being up and in to the sections after the person that was injured had been taken away!

GC Where was this about?

DM In Twenty Six Mine! Yes! Two were killed, then, but they died as a result.....

GC Two were killed! And do you know what caused the accident?

DM Oh, it was just a fall of shale, you know! A fall of shale!

GC From the roof?

DM From the face, aye!

GC From the face?

DM Aye! That's right, yes!

GC And did you find that any of the facemen took risks?

DM No, I wouldn't say that they took any risks! No, they were all good workers! In their respective jobs, you know! The timber was always set, you know!

GC They were safety conscious?

DM Safety first, yes!

GC Yes! And did you find any special comradeship working in the pits and the mines.

DM Oh, yes, you met.....in the pit, they were good company and workers, everybody was friendly and sociable, you know, they were a good class of workers in the shale mine!

GC And did this compare, when you were in New Zealand, the same comradeship?

DM The same comradeship, yes!

GC And the same friendliness?

DM The same friendliness! I can remember, in New Zealand, I was a fireman there, and I was put in this new section and I had to get the names, you know, and we had a few old Maori's working there, you know, and I said to this Maori, I said "What's your name, mate?" "I'm a sunburned Scotsman", he would say! His name was Tom Waikkata! "I'm a sunburned Scotsman", he says!

GC Did you find the Maori's easy to work with?

DM Yes! Yes! I got on well with the Maoris. There were quite a few shale miners in the same pit in New Zealand when I was there, in the mine I was in, in New Zealand, there would be about..... about eight shale miners, all working on the coal there, there was a family called Beans from Gavieside, the whole family came out and there was twenty three members of the family, all came out on the one boat! So, we met quite a few, you know, from the shale working in New Zealand! Yes!

GC And did you find that they enjoyed it as much as you did?

DM They enjoyed it! Yes, some of the family are still there! Still living! Way up about eighty eight or eighty nine years of age, now, some of them! Yes!

GC And did you.....were you a member of any Union when you worked in the shale mines?

DM Oh, I was attached to the Shale Miners Union, Mr. Nellies was the President

in those days, you know, in the Shaleminers Union!

GC And can you remember what your pay rate was, when you started? Away back when, you started?

DM It was two and six a day!

GC That's as a pony driver?

DM A pony driver! Two and six a day in Breich Pit.

GC Breich Pit?

DM And we had to walk from Breich Pit to Seafield to get paid on the Friday, and then walk from Seafield back to West Calder! On a Friday!

GC Of course, you left in 1924, so.....can you remember how much that you were earning then, roughly? Say, what was the difference between working here and the money that you got, wages that you got in New Zealand!

DM Oh, it was three times higher in New Zealand, than it was here! Yes! There was a big difference, in the wages! I mind, I finished up, I was lucky, I finished up shift foreman at six shillings a day! Maybe five or six shillings a day! I was a shiftman you know! In Scotland!

GC So, when you went out to New Zealand, it jumped to.....

DM Oh, it jumped in to pounds, in a week, you know!

GC So, your standard of living would go up much higher?

DM The standard of living was quite cheap in those days! You could get a sheep in those days, for about four.....four pounds, you could get a whole sheep.....they're selling today for about four pounds.... it's a glut now, they can't get anything with this Common Market, being in the

Common Market! So they're still selling mutton that cheap and lamb very cheap, about four pounds, for a whole carcass! The cost of living in New Zealand was much cheaper than it was here, in my day, you know!

GC So, when you started work, which Company would you start work with?

DM Pumpherston.....with Scottish Oils!

GC Was this Pumpherston Oil Company?

DM Pumpherston Oil Company!

GC Then there was the amalgamation!

DM They amalgamated with Scottish Oils!

GC Can you remember what seams that you were working in, the shale seams?

DM Well, the Dunnet was the main column, it could have been Dunnet, yes!

GC And in those days, what did you do as a pastime, for your social life, when you were younger? Had you an Institute Hall?

DM No, we never had an Institute in West Calder! We were the only village in the shale mines that didn't have one! Tarbrax, Winchburgh, Seafield all had their Institutes! But never West Calder!

GC And did you stay in West Calder when you started in the.....

DM Yes, I stayed in West Calder! Kirkgate in West Calder!

GC Was it an Oil Company's house?

DM No! No!

GC A private house?

DM A private property, yes!

GC And in your house, did you have electric light?

DM Gas! Gas in those days!

GC Gas? Running water?

DM Running water, but no toilet!

GC No toilet, no!

DM No, it was.....

GC Outside?

DM Outside, yes!

GC And when you.....when you came back, when you were working at...starting at Burngrange, coming back from New Zealand, where did you stay then?
Where did you live?

DM Still in Kirkgate, 41 Kirkgate in West Calder.

GC The same house?

DM The same house, yes!

GC And you then went to.....were you ever.....you wouldn't be affected by the one week off and four weeks on?

DM Yes, we had a short period of that! Yes! We had that at one time!

GC Can you remember why that came about?

DM Oh, it could have been a slump in the oil trade, I would think, yes!

GC There would be a lot of mines and pits closing around that time?

DM Not many in those days! No, it was only in the last.....if I was.....
when I was away, away about forty seven, forty eight, forty nine, that is
when the closing started! It was a very busy district in those days!
Plenty of work in the mines, you know!

GC But the main industry would be shale mining?

DM Shale! Few went to the coal pits, further on, onto Stoneyburn and
Blackburn. A few of the workers went there! To the coal....and Breich,
that was away out past Addiewell, you know, and Loganlea, a few of them
went there, and did jobs in the coal!

GC Could you say what the difference in the coal mining and shale mining,
doing similar jobs, how their wages compared?

DM I think that coal mining might have been ahead as far as wages went! In
the mining days, you know!

GC You felt that they got more money?

DM I think that they would be slightly higher paid than us, per shift,

GC And were you.....did I mention, yes.....the Union?

DM That was right!

GC And did you ever have any dispute?

DM I never had any dispute or anything in my time! No! They were all pretty content workers, the shale miners or oil workers.....

GC So, you never had any reason to call on them?

DM Never had to call.....no, no trouble at all!

GC And when you started work down the mine, what type of lamp did you use?

DM In my first mining experience, was with a tallow lamp, was in the Breich Pit, in 1915, and the metal, I think, had a certain amount of copper in the composition of it and it helped to melt the tallow! But it was an open flame..... just an open flame, through the wick, and then we went on to the oil lamp, similar to the tallow, and you always carried a little flask with your.....oil!

GC Was it the same design?

DM The same design! The same design of lamp!

GC And which was the better light?

DM Well, the lights were never very much different between the two of them! And then after we finished with the tallow lamp, and the oil lamp, we went on to the carbide which was a much better light! Yes! And then eventually we finished up with the battery lamp, which gave you a far better light!

GC that was better than the oil lights?

DM That was better than the oil lamps! Yes!

GC Did you work in many places where there was lots of gas?

DM Well.....I'd not say.....a lot.....but then during my time in Burn-

grange, a few times I had the fire damp, as they call it, methane, CH₄, an odd time, and pull the miners out until you got the place properly cleared! But.....in my fireman's experience, you never took a flame lamp down with you! When you went down to examine the shaft, you always carried one light which was an oil flame safety lamp, and you carried no other lamp! In some of the mines that I've been in, you only carried one lamp, and that was an oil flame safety lamp!

GC A Glenny lamp?

DM It was a Glenny! Yes! And eventually they allowed the fireman to carry the electric battery lamp! But you always had your flame safety lamp, which you used during the nightly inspection, you know, ventilation and gas!

GC Would you say that Burngrange was bad for gas?

DM No, I wouldn't say that! It was.....only during the pillar extraction when they took the whole pillar out, you know, a square block, and it leaves a cavity, you know, a huge area, of open ground, where the ventilation can't get into it, but I wouldn't say, that in my time, that it was a dangerous pit to work in! It was only when they extracted maybe say, two pillars out, and left the whole of that, before the whole thing came in, closed, you know! But in that area today, after eighty years, there's still a bore hole up there, that gives off gas, and it's been giving off gas for about eighty years, over eighty years! In one of the fields there! Yes!

GC And how was this brought to the surface?

DM This gas..... it was an old bore hole put down to find the early Burngrange mine, which was above Burngrange Pit, and this is one the same as was put down, to find out where the Burngrange seam was! Then a wee bit over that.....about two hundred yards further east, I remember the Americans putting down an oil well, in 1920. The Americans bored there for oil!

GC And did they get any success?

DM Well, there's a story there.....but I don't think that they got.....
I don't think that the.....they weren't boring in those days, with the modern type of boring that they have got today, you know! It was diamond bores, and it was only an old plunger thing that worked, and it broke through the strata and took a half turn, you know, it was like a huge chisel! There's still areas around West Calder where there's gas underground, through the strata you know!

GC And where this.....where Burngrange was, this outflow of gas, is this dangerous gas that came from below ground?

DM Well, the gas that has been coming from that bore hole is still methane, CH₄, because when I was in the Fire Service, years ago, I was a member of the Midlothian Brigade previous to the war, and was transferred into the National Fire Service. An odd night there would be a spotter plane came over, just to find out.....as I say, that bore hole is blowing again, and lit up at Burngrange so you had to send two men up to damp it down, with a wet sack, you know, but the gas is still coming out of that hole after eighty years.....over a hundred years.....yes! It's still giving off gas!

GC But there's not any fire now?

DM No, no! You could light a match to it, and set it on fire, which the kids used to do, during the war, just before dark, and you had to go up and damp it with the wet sacks, just smother it, you know! But there is gas in the area, you know! The whole of the area!

GC Is this gas just released at ground level, or is there anything takes it beyond.....

DM No, just the underground pressure sends it to the surface! Yes!

GC And is it fenced off or anything like that?

DM Well, I haven't been over for a number of years, but it was never fenced off! No!
And that was from the early Burngrange mine, which was above Burngrange shaft!

GC Did you find that the ventilation in any of the mines.....?

DM No, the ventilation was all pretty good.....there were big Sirocco fans,
you know, the fans they put in nowadays are very good! In the early days,
the miners couldn't go down.....well, I've been in mines, where the old
method of ventilation was still there, but not used, where they used to
light a fire to heat the air, and the hot air rose and the cold air was
cooled down, it was natural.....well, it was fire heating air, to take
the ventilation underground but not it's all electric fans, huge fans now!
I've been in two mines, where the evidence was still there of the old
method of ventilation there, and that was in Burngrange and in Australia. Yes!

GC Was that in Australia or New Zealand?

DM That was in Australia!

GC So, you were also in Australia?

DM Aye, I was fireman there too, and I went through all the waste workings,
testing for gas, and checking all the fire.....that they had big brick
stoppings up, with thermometers in them, and you had to take them out
and read the thermometers, find out whether the temperature was behind
the (inaudible) you know. The mine next to mine, it went up! One time,
there were about ten men killed there!

GC Where was this?

DM In Australia! But I've been on fires, trying to recover machinery..... there would
be two of us crawled in there, and we took all the men out, after the (inaudible)
and we went in to try and recover things, and we were, I would say, we were

about eighteen feet off a.....a huge twelve foot fire in front of us....oh, a whole seam on fire! Then we had to crawl in to get the machinery and release the nuts off the wheels, you know, to let them get away from it. No, the ventilation is greatly improved nowadays, you know!

GC So, you feel now, that you may return to New Zealand...and carry on your retirement there?

DM I'll definitely go.....I'm probably going back next year...I think! I've done most of my travelling, I've been three times back and I've been over to Canada, Hong Kong, and I've done four trips down to Spain, six weeks, just lately, I feel now, I think I'll go back!

GC Was there any miner or oilworker that went over to New Zealand, or Australia that became prominent in life there?

DM Yes, there were two! Two old local men, who became members of the New Zealand Government, when Peter Fraser was Prime Minister, and they were Angus McLaggan and Robert McKean.

GC And do you know where they came from?

DM West Calder! Well, one was born in Hermand.....it was Angus McLaggan, who became Minister of Mines.

GC And where did they work, over here in Scotland?

DM Well, they worked in.....they worked in one or two of the mines, but in the old days it might have been Hermand.....Hermand would have been going when his father was going you know.....Angus McLaggans.....

END OF TAPE

Transcript	DM
Industrial Information	I left school when I was fourteen years old and started work in Breich Pit in March 1915 as a pony driver.
Pit Ponies	There were about twenty ponies at Breich Pit and it was my job to bring the full hutches out to the loading point from the four faces.
Forty Shale Mine	I was there for about two years and then I was transferred to Forty Shale Mine at Graviesend where I was a pony driver as well. At Graviesend I had to bide in one section until I was used to it and I had to stay there until the chap gave it up.
Baads Colliery	I then went to Baads Colliery where I also spent quite a time as a pony driver as well. It was a very similar job as the shale mines. The roof was limestone and therefore we had to get the softest part for the pony to get down to the section. We travelled from Twenty Seven to Twenty Six every night and the pony walked down a trench so that it gave it clearance so as not to strike its head on the roof.
Lamps	My first mining experience was with a tallow lamp in Breich Pit in 1915. This was a metal lamp and I think it had a certain amount of copper in the composition of it and it helped melt the

tallow. It had an open flame through the wick. Then we went on to oil lamps which was similar to the tallow lamps but you always carried a little flask of oil. The two lights did not differ a great deal.

Carbide Lamp

We eventually started using carbide lamps which had a much brighter light.

Battery Lamp

We eventually finished up with battery lamps.

Australia

I left Baads Colliery to go to Australia and worked in the coal mines as a fireman.

Returned to U.K.

I returned to the United Kingdom in 1935.

Burngrange

When I returned to the United Kingdom from Australia they were starting the surface work for the pre-sinking of the mine shaft.

When the shafts were completed into the shale seam, I went on to be a shaftsman, pit bottomer and a shiftsman.

Sinking Burngrange

It would be about 1938 when they started sinking operations at Burngrange.

Contractors

The contractors who sank the Burngrange Shaft were McCullams.

When the shaft was completed the guides had to be put down and, when they were in position, I was asked to lay the rails on the pithead onto the conveyors to take the endless drives. I had all this

work to do by myself and the worst part was putting the cage on because when you got the four wheels on the cage, it was inclined to dip.

Fireman

I ended up training as a fireman and I had to go to mining classes and we trained at Heriot Watt College in Edinburgh.

Silver Badge

I did not get a certificate but a silver badge to say that I was an able bodied member of the fire services.

Fireman's Duties

The fireman had to go round before the commencement of the shift to examine all the working places in your section for any fire damp or methane.

Risks

I wouldn't say that the faceman took any risks and they were all good workers in their respective jobs.

Ventilation

The ventilation was pretty good because they put in big Sirocco fans, but in the early days it was the old method of ventilation. This was where they used to light a fire to heat the air which then rose and the cold air was cooled down.

Accidents

Two miners were killed in Twenty Six Mine by a fall of shale. I could not go into details.

Fire at Addiewell

When I was working in Forty Mine the retorts at Addiewell went on fire and

some of the workers were transferred to West Mains coal mine owned by Scottish Oils.

Unions

I was attached to the Shale Miners and Mr. Nellies was President of the Union in those days.

Strike

During the sinking of Burngrange Pit there was a strike at Hermand Pit. I have never had any dispute or anything like that in my time because we were all pretty contented workers that were in the mines during my time.

Domestic Life
Housing

I stayed in a private house in Kirkgate in West Calder.

Lighting

We had gas lighting in the houses in those days.

Toilet

We had no inside toilet and we had to go outside.

Leisure Activities
New Zealand

I left in 1924 and went out to New Zealand because I wanted to see the world and to visit my Mother's Uncle. I got in touch with them after I had been there for a wee while.

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