

DM.

Q. It was Westwood that you worked in wasn't it.

DM. Yes.

Q. When did you start.

DM. 1941/2.

Q. Had you just left school.

DM. Yes, I was about 15.

Q. What seam were you in at Westwood.

DM. Well, I worked on the pit bottom first and after that I went to the Broxburn seam. I had been down the Dunnet seam but not a lot.

Q. What was the Broxburn seam like to work in.

DM. It was low about 4 or 5 ft, in some places.

Q. Was it quite hard.

DM. No, it was not as hard as the Dunnet seam and was not as big either. It was softer and easier broken down than the Dunnet, it wasn't quite as big obviously it was a smaller seam.

Q. Were you in the drawing.

DM. I started in the oncost first and then I was a chain runner at Broxburn and then eventually went on to drawing in the Broxburn

Q. How much would you have to put into hutches in a day.

DM. How many hutches would you fill in a day? It depended on the length of road, you had a type of drawer who made have quite a distance to draw, but in a reasonable place you would be making a good wage if you filled 20 hutches depending on the area, some areas you could build the hutch a wee bit higher, you didn't stop at level, most places in the Broxburn you couldn't build them

high because the roof was low, you had to keep to the level of the hutch.

Q. How much were you putting into a hutch.

DM. If you got a good place, it varied around 16 cwt, unless you put by pieces lying across and try to fill it up, usually 16 cwt to 1 ton or over the ton depending on the seam you were - making between 18 to 20 ton a day, sometime over it, you could fill more than 20 if they were the wee hutches and you weren't building anything high enough, obviously you tried to build 20, 23 - anything from 18 to 20.

Q. How much were you getting for a ton at that time.

DM. About 4/-, it depended on a lot of things. You maybe had a steep place- so you had to have a cuddie, otherwise you couldn't take the hutch down. Obviously you had to take someone to take you down to go and travel some more distance, bring you through - empty, hooked it on there and took your empty back up. It could be water in the area, different conditions, bad pavements.

Q. Were you paid extra money for working in water.

DM. Certain conditions you got extra 1d or 2d. If you had to put up crowns (big larch trees) across the roof then you got paid extra for that, because it was a big job. It took a man a wee bit of time to do that, by the time he cut a space for the tree with the pick, then cut the other side and you had to get it in tight. They paid you to put trees up, you got paid for the roof. Then you got paid for these cuddies if you were using them, you got 1p a ton or 2, because it kept you longer, obviously if you had a cuddie you could only take one hutch at a time, but if you were on a nice level road, you could take 2 hutches at the time, because it took you longer to fill a hutch, sometimes you would only get two hutches out. Some of the roads were long, as long as maybe quarter of a mile nearly, it was quite a distance to get the hutches to a point where they would be taken away.

Q. Were you still being paid by the contractor at that time.

DM. Yes, at that time the money that was made was obviously due to the contractor working, if he did not work then we knew that we could not get the stuff without his wages and we would be out as well. So in a good squad, you worked with the faceman, drilling acid helping him to drill and also other things. If you had a lot of shale then the faceman

helped to fill the hutch as well.

Q. Were you using hand borers then.

DM. No, not when I was in the drawing, it was electric drills.

Q. Was it quite dusty.

DM. Yes, working in all that fine dust, as well as the conditions you had anyway, because you were a long way from the shaft.

Q. What about smoke from the explosives.

DM. It was always there but some areas the air system was better than others it depends on the distance you were away and if you had a good flow of air then it cleared the smoke and dust a bit. It didn't clear it entirely but it cleared it, and in others (places) it would hang for quite a 'bit. After the shot-firing you were supposed to wait a certain time, you usually did of course, but there were certain areas that it did not matter how long you waited you always got smoke. It was never away, but in some good areas, it cleared up pretty quick.

Q. Were you ever working with explosives yourself .

DM. Yes, well once you have done two years in the drawing you were allowed to work yourself. So if you were out on the back shift or day shift and the faceman did not turn up, then you were liable to be sent to work for someone who needed a drawer, or vice versa a faceman who was available somewhere would maybe be brought to your place, I did that. After two years and if your mate was not out, unless somebody was needing a shift, because of some problem on the face, then you would work yourself. Just fill and drill to what you needed and you did not need to pull 20 tons. If you did you make better money. You were looking for 12 or 13 (hutches) and then leave something for the day shift.

Q. What were the dangers down the pit.

DM. Ropes could break, something knocking the hutches off the road, trees depending how they were put in, there was always the danger areas where you were taking out the shale, of the roof falling in on you. You do get warning when a place is going to close but you also got large stones coming away from the roof, 8, 9 or ten feet long, with no warning. There

were people killed with something coming away with no warning or very little warning. Well in a very big area, where the shale had been taken out, eventually everything starts sinking down, then you got plenty warning. But there were times when bits fell, heavy bits, that maybe were just in a "skin" a glossy type skin between that and the shale, just a boulder that could come away.

Q. What about gas.

DM. There was gas in Westwood, but it never affected me in anyway. There was gas there in the Broxburn Section, it wasn't bad but there was gas in that area, there was always gas in the waste areas but if the air system was kept right then it was not dangerous. When I was in Westwood there was electric lights, there were not many sections left with naked lights. Certain areas were not allowed to use powder. It wasn't gelignite at that time, they were off gelignite onto a similar stuff, it was not powder it was not inflammable and it had to be detonated. Although I remember using powder, the sections I was in it was another explosive that was used (I cannot remember the name of it), but you used a detonator.

Q. Was the powder cheaper.

DM. Yes, the powder was good but you could not use it because of gas, or the dangers of gas. The powder had to be in solid ground, if you drilled into shale and there was cracks and holes then the powder was not any use, because whenever it was ignited the flame just went through the cracks. Whereas the gelignite or the other stuff blew the shale out the powder did not. It needed the tightness to push the stuff out. If you had good solid ground and no problems with gas, you used powder.

Q. You could not use powder if there was water.

DM. No, but when you're drawing out you usually didn't get in the water, it was lower down.

Q. Where were you staying when you worked in Westwood.

DM. Dedridge, that was a Scottish Oils house.

Q. What were you paying for rent.

DM. About 7/. a week.

Q. Did you have any other deductions off your pay, say the Doctor for instance.

DM. Insurance stamps and the usual kind of things. We used the Company bus but we had to buy a ticket and it cost us about 3/11d a week, which was a lot then. from Westwood to Dedridge. Most of the people would be going from Dedridge, Mid Calder, Oakbank Pumpherston, though there were not many from Pumpherston, one or two in Bellsquarry Polbeth but the bus did not usually go there, with Polbeth these people walked across to Polbeth or cycled as the distance was nothing from West Calder.

Q. Had those men been in other mines and moved to Westwood when they shut down?

DM. No some worked in different mines, some always worked in Westwood, some had worked in Burngrange, Hermand, towards Abercorn (?) Some people worked there they did not all go to Westwood, some went to the coal, but a number of people from Polbeth always worked in Westwood.

Q. What did you do in your leisure time, did you go to the Institute

DM. There was not an Institute at Dedridge for the miners, there was only 27 houses, the nearest one was Oakbank. There was not much to do at Dedridge, you made your own entertainment, whatever you wanted to do, any kind of games, quoits, the small quoits, anything to whittle away the time. We didn't have a hall, a bowling green, too wee a place for that, there was one at Oakbank, Deans, Seafield, Pumpherston. The nearest one attached to the Company was Oakbank, but that was another village, you didn't bother. Mid Calder was our area, but that wasn't Scottish Oils. There was snooker and billiards, you paid for that separately.

Q. Did you have a cricket club.

DM. Oh no, that was taboo.

Q. Was there football matches between the villages.

DM. Every night, even when we were at school, there was quite strong rivalry, to the bitter end. There were no drawback, there was no special games, though in the years further back they used to gather teams Mid Calder, East Calder. In my time we went into the amateur league and went round Bangour, Larbert and various other places, they used to write and ask you if you would come and play. We used to go along to Linburn and take out the blind men on the tandems at the weekend. But for special facilities, Oakbank was the nearest Institute.

Q. What were the houses like, were there outside toilets.

DM. No, not at Dedridge except at first, just out of the door, on the pavement, it was part of the building but you had to go outside to get in the door. There was no electricity then of course until just before the second world war. The coal house was a hole at the other end of the Kitchenette, so your coal was inside. So when they renovated, they knock that down and they built a coal house from the pavement, up against the toilet, then they built in a bath and your toilet inside. The coal house was built next to the toilet and a bath was installed, this made the kitchen shorter, but it meant that you had an inside bath and toilet, and then the electricity was put in, they were not bad houses. It was ahead of some of the older Scottish Oils houses.

Q. Did you have to stay in a Scottish Oils house.

DM. Not really, but the Scottish Oils house had a cheaper rent than the Council.

Q. You would not be working during the 1926 strike.

- DM. No, I was not born then. There was a three day strike during the war. There was a strike at Westwood, which lasted 3 days or 2 days. I was only doing a boy's jobs then. There was a strike at Westwood and Breich Pits, but I can't remember anywhere else being on strike. We were on strike for 2 or 3 days.
- Q. What was that about.
- DM. It was for money but also there were men coming to the pit instead of going into the army and getting more money for doing the same job as me (aged about 16 or 17) then, but they said they couldn't pay them less money and yet they were only doing my job. This was the argument, you were doing the same job for half the pay.
- Q. Did you get the money.
- DM. I cannot remember, it didn't alter that to a great extent, but I suppose their argument was that these people were going to be shifted up as soon as they got accustomed to working in the mine. I could see the logic, but at the same time it didn't help.
- Q. Was the Union fairly strong.
- DM. Personally, I thought it was rubbish, the unions did not have a great deal of power in those days, I could not see where they were much good. I think most people were in the Unions.
- Q. How much were you paying them.
- DM. 1/6d a week, I can't truly remember.
- Q. If you were active in the Union, what was the Company's attitude, did they make it harder for you.
- DM. It was not like nowadays, you never seemed to see anyone who was active

in the Union there were the Union Reps. who in those days had good jobs, or they never had any problems, there were never things that needed to be negotiated, they were given. It did not matter how good a rise the Company gave, if you went to a Union meeting there was always one Union rep. who would not accept the offer right away.

Q. If you joined the Masons, was that a way to get on in the Company.

DM. No, it wasn't worth it because my father was in the Masons and he led the worst life of anybody I know, because of the under-manager at Westwood at that particular time, he was a right reprobate if ever there was one. His name was Tam Brown and he was the biggest Arab that ever crawled and he was in the Masons. My father and Tam Brown, although both in the Masons, never got on. The Masons were like everything else, the only time you gained anything out of these things was if you flaunted it. There were people in the Masons that did not go about showing signs, apron or anything like that, there was those who done it, trying to, but I don't say they succeeded because of that, but they tried.

Q. Was there anything that the Company encouraged you to do, like joining the Church.

DM. No, not to my knowledge, but at one time the Managing Director, Bobby Crichton was a church man, but to my knowledge I was never told I should do this or do that.

Q. Were they not quite strict normally.

DM. That was more before my time, Oh, I have heard that you could not do this or that, they were quite strict.

Q. Was there much gambling went on.

DM. There was a lot of gambling, the coupon was your hope for the future, to get out of the mines and you were hoping to get enough to get yourself

out of it.

Q. Did the bookies or runners come down the pit.

DM. No, there was not much gambling down the pit, when you came up though you could have a bet on the horses, if you had time. I don't remember any gambling, I've seen the miners gambling occasionally down the pits at piece time it was an isolated person, it did not last.

Q. Was there regular card or tossing schools in the area.

DM. Oakbank was a regular Pontoon school, Broxburn and that area was a great Pitch and Toss place. I was never keen on Pitch and Toss, but it went on. Junior football or Senior football if you could afford to go to things like that, the coupon was the main thing. Of course it was just an odd thing, you have people who like horses, others who like dogs, but on the whole the coupon to me was the main thing (?)

Q. What year did you leave Westwood.

DM. 1961, to go to B.M.C.

Q. Did you have much bother getting a job there.

DM. No, I applied before it started, I waited, I wanted in as quick as I could. The actual Assembly line was not made when I first started, you were building trucks here and there on tressels. I started in September, I can't remember if it was before the end of that year or the beginning of the following year that the - of trucks started. It didn't run a lot, but it started to gear it up. By the following year the Assembly line was started.

Q. Was there a lot of men came from Westwood to B.M.G.

DM. When Westwood closed quite a few did, some went to the coal mines where they

could get a job but quite a number, a lot of jobs there laid on.

## Transcript

## DM

Schooling

I left school when I was about fifteen years old.

Industrial  
Information

I started work in the pits on the oncast to start off with.

Chain Runner

From the oncast I went to be a chain runner.

Drawing

From the chain running I went on to the drawing.

Hutches

It all depended on the length of the road how many hutches we filled. If we filled twenty hutches this was said to be a good shift.

The weight of shale in the hutches varied around sixteen cwt, which made between eighteen and twenty tons a day, sometimes over it.

Maybe we were working in a steep place we had to have a cuddie, otherwise we couldn't take the hutch down. The full hutches down and the the empty hutches on to take back up the hill.

#### Conditions

It could be that there was water in the area that we were working in. There could also be bad pavements. Sometimes we had to put up crowns (big larch trees) across the roof. It took a man a wee bit of time to do that. By the time he had cut a space for the tree with the pick and then cut the other side it was a tight fit.

#### Wages

We got paid about four shillings but this depended on a lot of things.

In certain conditions we got an extra one or two pennies. They paid us to put up trees and also the roof.

We got paid for the cuddies if we were using the, this worked out at about one penny a ton or two, because it kept you longer if we had a cuddie.

Some of the roads were about a quarter of a mile long.

Contractor	At that time the money was paid by the contractor that we were working for, because all the money was paid to him first. If he did not work we knew that we couldn't get the stuff without his wages.
Squads	In a good squad we worked with the faceman, we used to help him drill and other things. If we had a lot of shale then the faceman helped to fill the hutch as well.
Drills	When I was drawing we were using the electric drills.
Smoke From The Explosives	There was always some areas with a better air system than others. It all depended on the distance you were away from the good flow of air. After shot-firing you were supposed to wait a certain time, but in certain areas it did not matter how long you waited there was still smoke. Once you had been drawing for two years you were allowed to work yourself.
Shifts	If you were put out on back shift or day shift and the faceman didn't turn up then you were liable to be sent to

work for someone who needed a drawer or vice versa.

## Dangers

Ropes could break or something, knocking the hutches off the roadway with the trees.

There was always dangerous areas where you were taking out the shale. The roof could fall in on top of you.

You got warning when a place is going to close but there was also large stones coming away from the roof with no warning. In big areas where the shale was taken out, eventually everything started to sink but you got plenty of warning.

## Gas

There was gas in the Broxburn and Westwood sections. There was always gas in waste areas but if the air system was kept right then it wasn't dangerous.

## Powder

The powder was good but we couldn't use it because of the gas. The powder had also to be used on solid ground. If you drilled into the shale and there were cracks in it then the powder wasn't good because the flame just went through the cracks

when it was ignited.

Gelignite

Gelignite or the other stuff  
blew the shale right out,  
which the powder did not do.

Electric Lights

When I worked in Westwood we  
had electric lamps and there was  
not many sections left with  
naked lights.

Transport

We used the Company bus for  
transport to the mine. We  
had to buy a ticket which cost  
us 3/11d a week which was a lot  
of money then. Most people would  
be going from Dedridge, Mid  
Calder, Oakbank, Pumpherston.  
Not many men from Pumpherston  
used the bus. The men from  
Polbeth walked or cycled as  
the distance was nothing  
from West Calder.

Strikes

I was not born when the 1926  
strike took place. There was  
another strike that took place  
during the war but it only  
lasted two or three days.  
There was also strikes at  
Westwood and Breich Pits but  
I can't remember anywhere else  
being on strike.  
We did go on strike for more  
money and also because the men  
coming to the pit instead of

going into the army and getting more money for doing the same job as me.

I can't remember if I got extra money but I don't think it altered a great deal.

Unions

I thought the union was rubbish because they did not have a great deal of power in those days. You never saw anyone who was an active member of the unions in those days.

It did not matter how good a rise the Company gave the men, if you went to a Union meeting there was always one Union rep who would not accept the offer right away.

B.M.C.

I left Westwood in 1961 to go to B.M.C. to work.

Domestic Life  
Housing

The housing at Dedridge was not very good because it was part of a building and you had to go outside to get in the door.

We had a kitchenette in the house which was made shorter when the bath and toilet was installed.

Electricity

Electricity was put into the house at a later stage and this made the house better.

Rent

The rent we paid for this house

was about seven shillings a week.

Social Life  
Church                      The Company did not make you join a church and this was left to yourself.

Institute Hall              There was an Institute Hall at Dedridge for the miners where we used to play quoits.

Bowling Green              We didn't have a bowling green because the hall was too wee a place for that.

Football                      There was quite strong rivalry at football. In my time we went into the amateur league and we went to Bangour, Larbet and various other places to play football.

Gambling                      There was a lot of gambling and the football coupon was our hope for the future.  
There wasn't actually much other forms of gambling down the pit.

Pontoon                      Oakbank was a great place for a regular pontoon school.

Pitch and Toss              Pitch and toss was played a lot in Broxburn.

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