

EC SIDE ONE

EC Well in 1941, I was on the dole and I got a green card from the dole for to go to Winchburgh Brick Works.

GC What age were you then?

EC Just sixteen! I went there and the Manager wasn't there, so as I was coming back, I walked up to Threemiletown, 35 Pit, and saw the under-manager, John Sneddon, and he told me to come back the next day, as the Manager was coming, Peter Wilson. I went back and he told me I had got a job, and to start on Monday. I got a job, and started on the backshift, I got a job on the pit bottom, where all laddies started, you know, you just fill up.

GC Right underground?

EC Aye, you went right underground, but it was always men that were on the pithead, at 35, there were no laddies. From the pit bottom you moved further up.....

GC What did you do at the pit bottom?

EC Well, at the pit bottom, it was.....you put the full hutches on the cage, and as you were going up, the other empty one was coming down, you had to pull them off and pull them away in the haulage again, and you waited till the other full ones came out, they just put them on, that was all you did all the time, like, and I started, I got a job as pony driver, and I was on that.....I think I started on the drawing about 1945-1946.

GC Now, your pony driving, how did you get on with that job, how did the ponies react to you?

EC I used to like the pony driving, but you had your own pony like, and there were three ponies in 35 Pit, when I went, the one I used to drive was Joey, and there was a white one called Jimmy, it was a bit of a dog, and there was another one, a big one called Major. That was the three ponies in there. You were always wanting more money so you had got start tackling the drawing, which was the hardest job in the pit, and you eventually got a job there, I was on the drawing from then till it shut down, in 1958.

GC What happened when you were drawing? What sort of work was entailed? How far had you to draw from there to the face?

EC Well, there were all different.....what we called roads, long roads, short roads and different.....you could get a.....you could make good wages, if you get a good road and had good facemen to work with, that could howk the stuff, and the more he howked the more you filled, and....
.....you were always paid by the ton.

GC Can you remember the wages that you got?

EC I just can't remember the wages that you got as a laddie, but I can always remember the first wage that I ever made at the drawing was £1.6d. a shift, that was Company wages.

GC Now, who paid you, was it the Company, or the faceman?

EC The Company.....but the Company gave you.....that was your standard wage, £1.6d, if you worked with your faceman, he could tell the Manager to go half stuff, we called it half stuff, you know, they halved the wages, or they could tell you to put...maybe, if they thought that you had a good week, to put another fiver in from him, but that Archie White we're talking about, he always half stuffed with us, I really made good money with him.

GC Did you actually work with him?

EC Aye, I worked with Archie!

GC And he was.....?

EC He was a faceman.

GC And were there any other workmen that.....colleagues that you worked with, at the face?

EC Well, I worked with Archie's brother, wee Peter, and I worked with another one down there, George Hume, and another big boy from Bridgend Jimmy Owen, and these were the four boys, that I worked with.

GC And did you quite enjoy that?

EC I really enjoyed 35, because when you started as a laddie, and you got to know everybody, and there was always a great atmosphere, with the miners, you know, working.....we all got on.....each others heads off, but it was all in fun like, you always got a great laugh, a great bunch of boys, when you were finished and you went out on a Saturday night for a drink or met them anywhere, you always got a great laugh.

GC What age were you when you started as a drawer?

EC I would be about eighteen. Eighteen or nineteen.

GC And what other pastimes did you have at that time?

EC Well, there wasn't much pastimes about Philpstoun, there was.....nothing in here like, just.....

GC Did you have an Institute?.....or hall?

EC Well, we had the Hall.....we had the Hall, that was always kept off

your wages. I think it was a penny a week we paid. We only got it in the winter time. It shut during the summer for the sake of the bowling green, it was run by the Scottish Oils, too. But we were young lads we never bothered about bowls much.

GC How long were you in that job as a drawer.....in 35?

EC It would be from 1945 to 1958.

GC So that's really when 35 closed?

EC Aye, 1958.

GC Were there any incidences that stick out in your mind, during that time that you were down that pit? Any accidents?

EC Aye, well, there was that.....I hadn't long started, in fact, the first boy I had up there that was killed up there was Jock Whitelaw from Uphall. I didn't know him for I wasn't long started, and he was on opposite shifts and he was.....

GC Did you know what caused his accident?

EC It was a roof fall, and Wullie Cormack, he came from Winchburgh, he was like myself too, he was on the oncost, and I was at the pit bottom, because I started.....he was at the other end of the haulage, hooking hutches on, and it was a steep incline, and they had just put a new haulage rope on, and when you put a haulage rope on, you knew if there was an awful lot of.....vibration, burning and that.....Wullie was putting a hutch on to us, what we called a stye, a steep bit, and he put one hutch on and he was standing with the other hutch to put on, when the other hutch run back and he got jammed in between it.

GC Was he killed instantly?

EC No, he died in the Infirmary, or on the road to it, because I saw him

at the pit bottom that night, he was talking. You knew he hadn't long to live, because he was crushed from there....down..... like.

GC The waist down....?

EC And there was another young lad, Joey Williamson, he was an oncost worker too, he got killed when a chain runner as they called it...and big Dally Finnigan he got burned, he died, and there was another wee boy. Jimmy.....

GC Have you any idea what caused that?

EC No..... that was supposed to be an explosion with gas, it blew back on him, old Jimmy Fairley from Broxburn, he fell out of the cage one morning coming in down the pit, for his work.....

GC How did he manage that?

EC Well, nobody seemed to know, because on the cage....the cage could only take four men, once you went in they put two bars, just dropped them down, so that you couldn't.....! don't know how the man....he must have taken a kind of bad turn, and fell in between them like, after that they put a right shutter gate on to stop.....

GC So that's the precautions that they took after that?

EC Aye!

GC Are there any other things that happened that you can remember?

EC As I've said, I enjoyed working in 35.....

GC And did you know what type of work you would have done in the brickwork, that you went in for first, compared to going down the pit?

EC No, not really, I just looked at it, and as I told you the men said,

"Fling your cart in the Canal, get away hame!".

GC You actually saw the conditions in the brickwork?

EC I actually saw the conditions..... it was dirty, it was as black as anything came out of this.....it was all wet clay they were handling and you would need to be a hardy boy to stick it one day!

GC So you think that you were better off.....

EC I was better.....

GC Had you any of your family that were miners?

EC No, no, as I say my father worked in the Oilworks.

GC Which Oilworks?

EC Philpstoun.....I think that finished about 1937 or something, or maybe before that.

GC He would be about the only relation that you had that worked in the....

EC I had two brothers....but they didn't work long, you know, in it..... because the time that they were in it, it wasn't long till it shut down.

GC Were there any special safety precautions that you had to take, when you were down the mines?

EC Well, in 35, you actually got sent home for smoking, for you weren't allowed to smoke. Three of us got caught one day with a fag, we weren't actually smoking, but we had the fags with us mind! We got caught and fined £1. It had to got to charity.

GC So smoking, that was banned, which it should be I suppose. If you

had cigarettes or matches, had you to leave them anywhere before you went down?

EC You were supposed to leave them in the.....you understand that you were not supposed to take them down with you, but you were at the pithead and you used to always shout to the fireman to see if everything was alright, and they would just shout you in and ask you if you had fags, sometimes he would get you to empty out your pockets and that, I've seen them putting them in their piecebox and in their sock, under their hat and everything.

GC So, it was quite a common thing?

EC It was quite a common thing for the men to smoke. I mean, the men never took any chances, they always seemed to sit where there was a good bit air blowing about, you know, you wouldn't sit in a wee....where you thought there was gas, but you always had your Glenny lamp..that was to test for gas. You very seldom smoked there, you always waited for your piece break. You sat together where there was always quite a good air course, to take it away, sometimes you had to look to see which way it was going, in case the Manager or the gaffer came out, so that he wouldn't walk into the reek. You tried to waft it away from you!

GC Did you have a lookout posted?

EC Well, in the distance you could always see their lamps...coming...you know, you had always time to put out your fag, walk about with your jacket to get the reek away.

GC Do you think that it was easily smelled?

EC It was smelled, aye, very easily smelled!

GC When you were underground.....

- EC Sometimes you could just hang about and you could smell it.
- GC Especially if there wasn't much air?
- EC Not much air! That's right!
- GC Flowing through! Now, you left there and went....where did you go from there?
- EC Stein's brickwork.....manual. I was in there in 58, for just about a year.....till 59, I started back down there in Whitequarries, and I finished in 1962. No I wasn't very struck on that!
- GC Where did you go in Whitequarries....after you finished the brickwork?
- EC I left the brickwork to go there, down at Whitequarries.
- GC What kind of work did you do there?
- EC The drawing too. It was different down there, because what they called down there was the "pan runs" there was no...you didn't go on the hutches down there, you just shovelled on to these "pan runs", and the hutches caught it at the bottom. There were always laddies at the end of the belt to get the hutches off. It was easier work, but it wasn't the same money, not in the bit that I was in like, you know, you had to shovel more stuff, which was easier, because you were only turning it over into a pan, you know, it just kept shaking away all the time, you just kept filling into it.
- GC And what differences did you find.....what number of pit was it?
- EC No.1.
- GC It was No.1. What was the difference that you can think of between No.1. and 35, like working conditions and type of work?

EC The conditions would be much the same in Whitequarries as 35, if I had been using.....on to the hutches again, you know. But it was getting more kind of modernised in 35, there were never "pan runs" in 35, just ail the hutches, and as I say it was easier to work, I don't know, it was just there was a different kind of atmosphere down there, I think, it was maybe just because I wasn't brought up in it.

GC You felt that you were brought up in 35?

EC I felt that I was brought up in 35, aye!

GC But not in Whitequarries! And were there any incidents at Whitequarries? Any accidents?

EC Not at the time that I was there, there was a boy from Bridgend was killed, but that was before.....

GC Who was the Manager at Whitequarries?

EC Dick Nelson. He was under-manager, there was a boy. Hector Smith, he was the overall Manager.

GC When you left Whitequarries, where did you go.....that was 1962.....

EC I got a job as a lorry driver.....

GC Is that what you're doing now?

EC I've been there since, aye!

GC Now, thinking back to when you started work, did you stay in a Company house?

EC Aye, I stayed in a Company house before I got married, and when I got married, I got a Company house in Philpstoun and it was all room and kitchens, or "but and bens" you were talking about, you had no hot

water, a big open fire, and then we moved into a Council house....
down in.....

GC Had you flush toilets?

EC Aye, we had flush toilets, when we moved into a Company's house, a room and kitchen, your toilet and your kitchenette as it was called, the scullery as we called one of this.....

GC Had you electricity?

EC We had the electricity, aye! The rents weren't very dear, I can't remember what they were, but they were kept off your wages. (Wife talking- Five shillings a week I think.) Aye well, when I stayed with my mother, when I started, it was only about 4/3d. was your wage...
....was your rent, they just kept the rent off your wages.

GC What kind of health system did they have? Did they take anything off your wages to pay for the Doctor? Had they any medical services?

EC I think if I mind right you had....you always paid your own Doctor, I think it was about 3d a week or something, that was before this free national health came, kind of pricey now. but that was old Doctor Gardiner....before I got married, when he retired we got Doctor Carter.

GC Did the Company have a Doctor that they called?

EC Aye, they always had a Doctor, see, you always had to try and get your own Doctor. If he couldn't come, they had to get another Doctor. I always remember another instance, when I got my fingers cut. I came to the pithead to report to my own Doctor, and he couldn't come, so they had to get Doctor Thompson from Uphall to come through.

GC Of course, he was used a lot by the Company.

EC Aye, he was used quite a lot by the Company, if they couldn't get your own Doctor. Especially at 35, well, it was nearly all Broxburn boys and Uphall boys that worked up there and he got all the....I always mind as laddies at the school, we used to go down to Merrilees there, and watch older laddies that worked in Duddingston. Once in the year there was the Linlithgow Show, and the laddies used to go down and go in with them, follow them in the road, all with their different....all with their own ponies and that.

GC This was the Agricultural Show?

EC The Agricultural Show as they called it!

GC So there must have been....a competition?

EC There was a competition for the best pit pony!

GC And how were.....how were they judged?

EC I didn't know much about.....

GC Had they to dress them up or anything?

EC They just kept them kind of clean and always well brushed and it was just....it wasn't an agricultural boy that was judging, they would maybe just have a minister or somebody there that was at the show just to judge the pit ponies.

GC So that was one of the few times that the ponies were seeing the daylight?

EC One of the few times that they were up, aye! In 35 Pit, they weren't well..... they went into the Pit, and the ponies didn't get up much because it was enough of a bother to sling them from the bottom of the

cage like....in the mines you could walk them up, but with 35 Pit, it is the pit and you couldn't get them up.....

GC A shaft?

EC Shaft, you see!

GC You mentioned something about when you were.....

EC The Unions.....

GC Something about the Unions.....?

EC The Unions.....

GC You had a wee dispute?

EC A wee dispute! I mind the day we had.....

GC How old were you then?

EC I must have just been about....before I was 18, there was a wee dispute, because there was always something in 35, the pit laddies always got a penny more than the other laddies in the different mines, and we were getting a rise and we thought that we were going to lose this penny, we were all sitting, backshift, and we weren't going down the pit, till the Managers came round. Jock Sneddon and said "What's the trouble". We told him that we weren't going down the pit till we saw about this penny. "Well", he says, "You can either go down the pit, or down the "B1....." road". So nobody went down the road.

GC Is that the only time you.....can you remember who your Union Official was, who.....?

EC Well, when I went there, It was Geordie Crawford from Uphall Station. He worked in the Pit, he was our Union Official, and I think that the

man above him was McKelvie, I can't remember his first name, you know, he was the kind of head man.

GC And you didn't have any problem with the Union, or you didn't have to fight any other time or anything?

EC No, we didn't have much trouble up there with the Unions!

GC Of course they didn't have the strength that they have now.

EC No, no. The Union was just there for the sake of the thing, but they never they hadn't the stronghold then, that they have now, which has wasted a lot of companies from.....

GC You'll be in the Union with the job that you're doing just now?

EC Aye, I'm in the Union just now, aye!

GC Do you have any disputes with the Management there?

EC Well, it must be about five or six years ago, since the lorry drivers were on strike, but that's the only time that we had any trouble.

GC And do you find that the Unions now, would do more for you than they would when you worked with Scottish Oils?

EC I wouldn't think so, as I say, we never had much dispute with the..... in the shale mines like.....I don't know, it was just.... there wasn't as much trouble then.

GC You felt that....as if you were a member of a happy family?

EC Aye, that's how I felt up in 35 anyway, I was a member of a happy family!

GC And your bowling, did you bowl at that.....?

- EC No, I didn't bowl at that time, I kept.....eh.....
- GC Even when you went to Whitequarries?
- EC No, I wasn't bowling then either. When I was later on in the Mines, after I got married, I started up the racing pigeons, and that was my hobby then.
- GC That was quite common?
- EC Aye, it was common with miners, aye!
- GC Was the bowling green built by the Company?
- EC Philpstoun Bowling Green, I notice, down there, since I became a member, that the first championships were in 1924, that's the year that I was born, so I don't know how long it was before that, that they started having their championships. 1924 was the first. And that was all just for miners then, it was an old man's game.
- GC Nowadays that's all changed!
- EC That's all changed! In Philpstoun now, we've got the Scottish Junior Triples, that's 12 and 13 year old's. They went to Dunoon this year and won that. So it's not an old man's game now!
- GC It certainly isn't! And were there a lot of pigeon fanciers when you were young, or around you?
- EC Well, when I was at school, there was...they all used to be round the back of the washhouses, and there wasn't a washhouse without a dovecot at the back of it.
- GC And they were all oilworkers?
- EC They were all oilworkers, in fact, I used to hear a story that the

Oilworks gave the men the money to build the lofts, which was cheap then, and they kept it off their wages, till it was paid, because.....Mr. Crichton used to encourage it.....the pigeon racing.....

GC Of course...he stayed in Philpstoun.....

EC He stayed in that big house.....

GC Did you ever come into contact with him? At all.....?

EC Quite a few times, aye!

GC Is that when you were in the Mines?

EC When I was in the Mines, aye! Well, he was kind of giving up, because he wouldn't go down the Mines so often, he was down the pit quite often like, but not as often as would have been when he was younger.

GC And did you feel that he was quite knowledgeable about what he was looking after, and talking to you about?

EC Oh aye, he was awful easy to get on with like, in the Mines and that! He would stand and speak to you like any other man, and listen to your grievances if you had any!

GC And would he do anything about a grievance?

EC Oh aye, he was more or less what they called the head of the house, if he couldn't do it, nobody else could! There was always an old saying in Philpstoun. I mind at the school, when, ken the men used to gamble, and they all used to stand and gamble and say "Here's the police coming", nobody ran! But when they said "Here's Mr. Crichton coming", everybody ran!

GC So he certainly didn't favour the gambling?

EC No, he wasn't a gambling man!

GC Was this pitch and toss, was it?

EC Aye, pitch and toss!

GC That was quite common?

EC Just a miner's gambling game!

GC And you didn't take part in any of these things, did you? Pitch and toss?

EC Later on, aye, but you used to go along the Canal banks and down the foot of the rows, as we called them!

GC Did you have a lookout posted somewhere, in case the police.....?

EC There was supposed to be, but they used to get more interested than the boys that were pitching and they would all get in to try and get their fly bet on! The posts got deserted now and again!

GC And what kind of money changed hands?

EC In these days? Well, if you won a fiver, you were a rich man!

GC What would a weekly wage be for you then? When are you talking about?

EC I just can't remember what I got as a laddie, but on the drawing, it was £1.6d, and that was about your £6 odds at the top. That's what was called Company "tack". If you were on your...ken, a good bit, that you could make money, you could maybe come home with £9 or £10 and you were well off then!

GC So if you won £5, at the pitch and toss, that was about half a week's wages?

EC Aye, I always mind, when I got married first, and I can't remember where I was working, but I started working with Archie Whyte, and the first two or three weeks with him. There was just me and the wife at the time, just the old "but and ben". I came home with £13 and the wife thought I was a millionaire.

GC (Inaudible).

EC Aye, I suppose.....

GC Can you think of anything else that might be of interest to the Museum?

EC No, I think I've told you all that I can tell you!

END OF TAPE

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