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GB SIDE ONE

1

GB Well, I came to the pit.....I came here in 1938, and I started in 35 in 1938, in the drawing. I drew off a Wull Kerr, you know, he belonged up Dechmont way.

Q. You started as a drawer? Now, how did you get started in the pit?

GB I got the job whenever I went to the pit. You know, at that time, the men were scarce, and there was a fella, he lost his job, and I got started on that job. As I told you already, it's hard work! In fact, if there was a job open, you had to take what you got.

Q. Had you any relations that worked in the shale mines, or pits.....?

GB My father and my brothers worked in the pit. They came here first, that's how it brought us through to Bridgend. My father took up shale mining again, he was from the coal, and he came back to the mines. Gradually we came back too, you know, to the district.

Q. And you came back....what did you do before you started in the shale mining?

GB Coal.....

Q. You were in.....you were a coal miner before you.....went into shale?

GB Aye, I started in Rosewell. I worked in two pits actually, before I came here, I worked in Rosslyn and Rosewell. I had no intentions of coming through to this district, but you know how it is with families, you just come through with your father and.....my father and them came through and stayed here, before they got a house, and then we followed on at the back. So I got a job at the pit.

Q. Was it in miner's rows that you stayed?

GB No this scheme! This scheme was built in 1937, you know. My father was through in 1937, by that time, it was just the beginning of 1938, when I came through.

Q. So this was a local authority scheme.....house?

GB Aye, this was a

Q. Council house.....?

GB Well, they done away with the rows, and this was a new scheme built, you know, a combination between the Cavil and Bridgend..... the miner's rows, they built large houses, done away with the miner's rows, you see, that split families. There were people came to Bridgend, and there were people went to Winchburgh, you know, were all mining..... there were people that worked in Winchburgh Works..... there..... that helped the people the houses you know, and then through the time that they came, they were looking for a checkweighman, so.....at the pit, so it went to a vote, the men, they advertised the job, and whoever went to....there was four I think went in for it.

Q. How long had you been at the pit when this job came up?

GB Oh, that was while in the pit.....I worked five years, that would be 1951 or something, you know, five years just, when that Geordie McGee, he'd been on that job for as long....he came from Broxburn.

Q. So you would be the last checkweighman at No.35 Pit?

GB Who?

Q. You!

GB Aye! Geordie McGee, he was the man.....he retired from the job, ken he retired from the job, and they put the job up and then the men have to vote for the man they want. Well, there was me and Geordie Crawford was the two men that came, the both of us had the same vote, the same amount of votes, so they had to take another vote. Well....I got through with one vote.

Q. The second time?

GB Aye, the second time!

Q. And that's how you got the job?.....is the miner's vote you on?

GB Aye, the miners vote you on. That's right. It's the miners....it's their say, it's their man, what they think will be a man that will suit them like, for their benefit.

Q. What would you say that they looked for in the man that they wanted?

GB Well, honesty I would think so, it would be, to look after their interests, they thought that the experience that I had, I would be able to stick up for their rights. Whatever they things.....you've got to..... when the full....when the hutches came up, there's you and then there's the pitheadman, well, you stand for they..... they.....pins or hutches, you know, you take the pin off the boy when he puts it in....when the pitheadman, when the pitheadboy puts it on, you declare who it belongs to. They all had different pins of their own, different kinds of pin.

Q. What kind of things did they have for pins?

GB Och, I've seen washers and some had numbers and bits of string and wool, red wool, but you always had one, up, you had them all round, you knew who's, their name on them.....

Q. Had you a board up.....?

GB Aye, you had a board up, you knew who they belonged to. And you just put.....aye. The pin..... the man.....

Q. And were you working beside a weighman that was paid by the Company?

GB Aye, that's right. That's who I'm crying a pitheadman, you see. He's..

Q. Was he the weighman?

GB He actually is the weighman. He was the weighman, you just watched that it was right and he weighed it, you just tallied on. I hadn't anything to do with the weighing of the hutches. It was the pitheadman, that was his job.

Q. You were there to look after their interests?

GB I was there to look after the men's interests, that they were there.

Q. And what kind of things happened in that job?

GB I've seen me sometimes being....the hutches being heavy, weighted, the pitheadman thinking that they were too heavy, or something like that. So.....

Q. And how do you think that he could tell this?

GB Well, the way that the shale.... there's some shale that was lighter than

the others, ken, and then he would think it was some blaes, ken, or that, if he thought it was too heavy, all that he got, he would maybe get put off, and he would maybe get a "crowpicker", ken, a labourer to come up and griddle it, there was maybe dirt or that.... then weigh it, then you had to argue with them, och, that's alright, ken... the.....

Q. Did they empty a full hutch?

GB Aye,.....empty a full hutch and griddle it, take the dirt out of it, and then put it back in again, and then.....

Q. Re-weigh it.....?

GB And then they lost whatever was on it, if they thought it was blaes, ken, it was thrown out, and it came back, you lost it, just ken the weight that they took off. That was taken off your hutch, you know what I mean, that was taken off.....

Q. You must have had a lot of complaints from the miners then.....or the men bringing it up?

GB Oh well, they kent themselves when they were filling blaes, but you argued.....I mind of Robert Crichton there.....even the man that I had beat in the vote, came to me, and he says "That's just like taking money out of the till". "Och", I says, "Mr. Crichton, you're getting money out of that". He never said anything, and that was the.....he was the head man.

Q. Oh yes?

GB Aye, he was the head man!

Q. And that was your job? Was just.....and you did that for five years?

GB Five years!

Q. Before 35 closed? Were there any other incidents in that....job...that you were in as checkweighman? That you can remember?

GB The only thing that I.....was there.....you know it was a wooden structure you know, the pithead was a wooden structure, and they had altered it to

steel structures, ken, through the time that I was at...that was..... it was funny that, after building all that, and changing it to steel, being so short of time, ken what I mean, it only went the five years!

Q. Do you think that they knew at that time, that it was short lived?

GB Oh aye! They kent that because they stopped the wagons coming in, you know, there was wagons coming in, and they started taking the coal away from the pit to Winchburgh Works, ken, to Winchburgh Works, it used to... the coal went in the wagons to Niddry Works, and then when it thingummied there, they took it there to Winchburgh Work, ken, done away with the railways. So we kent the writing was on the wall then. It was all lorries, ken, that Orr from.....

Q. And of course, when you took up this job as checkweighman, that was you not employed by the Company after that?

GB That's right! That was me taken away!

Q. So, if you knew that the writing was on the wall, didn't you think....

GB I wouldn't have taken that job!

Q. So, you didn't really know what was happening?

GB I didn't know what was happening, but I'll tell you an incidence, that was with Crichton.....says to me when I was six months.....Mr. Crichton says to me when I was on the job for six months, he says, "I'll let you go back and get you (inaudible) for, ye ken, if you go back to your own job", he says. I never thought,ken, not being long enough luggit, or I would have went back to my own job, surely.

Q. And how did the money compare to.....going from the job that you were doing before you took the checkweighman's job?

GB It was a bit less right enough, but ken, the position that I was in, it wasn't bad, I was collecting the Union money, and that kind of made you up, ken, you got so much for.....I collected the Union money as well, and handed it over to the Broxburn boys.

Q. Can you remember the names of the Union.....?

GB Oh, Hughie Breslin, Jimmy Orswell, in fact they are all dead now, ken, they're all dead now. Hughie Breslin, he came, he stayed in Broxburn.

Q. And you actually collected.....how much did they pay then at that time?

GB Oh, it was about sixpence a week, about sixpence a week.

Q. And who.....did you have anything to do with representing the....if they had any....?

GB No. Hughie Breslin was their representative. By rights I should have represented them, but ken, I never got into that.

Q. And can you remember any grievances that they had that was brought in front of the Union?

GB No, there was never very much, there with the Unions. We never had..... I never heard of any grievance with the Unions, bar it was the the thing they didn't pay the men, you know, say likes of a man had a bad place or a long road and he couldn't draw enough, or couldn't get enough to pay himself, ken, the make-up pay, ken. Jock Sneddon, he was the under manager there.....

Q. Was there any allowances for that?

GB As a matter of fact there weren't allowances, but they should have got their money, ken, they should have got paid their wages, ken.....

Q. A basic wage?

GB Aye, a basic wage!

Q. And was it just your luck what kind of face you had, or were working from? How much money you got, or how much money you earned?

GB Oh aye! I thought the easier you worked, the better the job that you had you know, and the more money that you had, you know what I mean. Oh aye, that's right, I mean I had a job for a while and I had good money. I was working with the wife's father at the time. Aye, I made some good money then!

Q. Where was that about?

GB In the same.....in the pit.....

Q. In 35.....?

GB In 35!

Q. And what were you doing there?

GB Drawing! I was just drawing!

Q. How did you feel that you were making.....were you making more than the other drawers?

GB Oh well, I think so! I mean there's men that makes money and other men that doesn't.

Q. In other words, he played fair with you as far as the money was concerned?

GB Oh aye. Oh aye, there was.....I never had any trouble with any man that I worked with, ken they all played the game, ken what I mean, you all got 50-50, you know what I mean. It's not all....everybody that got 50-50 there, there were a lot of grievances, ken, getting men that wouldn't pay 50-50. You would know that yourself!

Q. Yes!

GB Oh, I never had any problems like that!

Q. And what involvement did you have, like as a drawer? What actually was your job?

GB Oh that.....you took your.....you filled your hutches and took the wood in, took the material, ken the wood.....material for his roofing and that, ken, that was your responsibility, filling the shale and taking it away, giving him assistance, giving the faceman any assistance that was available. You took all his timber, you ken.....

Q. Was there only the one drawer working to that face?

GB Aye, oh aye, it was all your own roads, ye ken, you went in there and it was only you and the faceman.

Q. Now, were there any accidents that you know of? That happened when you were working there?

GB Oh, aye, there were two or three accidents. There were two or three

killed in the pit, that's in my time!

Q. Can you remember their names?

GB Oh, there was one.....eh.....Williamson.....from Broxburn.

Q. What happened to him?

GB Oh, I can't remember, it was down the wee dook....he got.....do you know Wullie Williamson? He used to work in the Pumpherston Work.

Q. And of course there was your own accident?.....Jimmy Jarvie, from Uphall, was eh...oh, he got killed too.

Q. Do you know what happened to them? Why this happened?

GB Oh,.....I'm just trying to mind now, and there was a Wullie McCormack from Winchburgh, he got killed in the pit.

Q. But you don't know what happened?

GB And there was Dally Finnigan, he got.....with gas, you know, he was working.....you've never been interviewing an Andrew Spears here. No? He stays here, he drew with Dally Finnigan. He went back....he fired his shot and he went back, you know, and it just blazed up, and he must have inhaled it, inhaled the gas, ken.....Burnt, blasted, I don't think he lasted a week.

Q. So he went to hospital?

GB Oh aye, he was taken right away, and they hadn't much hope for him, ken.

Q. What about your own accident?

GB Oh.....

Q. What happened?

GB The police said..... Oh, that was breaking a bit shale, just a bit shale that was too heavy, you know, I'd to break it up a bit, and a bit floated up and hit me right in the eye, just hit me right in the eye!

Q. Was it like a splinter?

GB Just a splinter? It was a felled splinter!

Q. And it hit you right in the eye! What happened.....did you lose your eye?

GB No, no, I didn't lose it, there, ken, they saved it for about so many years or something and I was forced to lose it, ken, the pain was that severe.....in the daylight, ken, likes of that..... light like that, affected it!

Q. Was there any compensation?

GB I got some, but not much!

Q. But you can't remember how much? When did that happen? What year did that happen?

GB Oh, not many years after the war!

Q. And that was when after the war finished? Did it affect you very much?

GB No, no.

Q. You didn't let it bother you at all?

GB No, no. It never bothered me.....

Q. Did you enjoy working in 35?

GB Oh aye, it was happy.... there were a lot of young fellows there, it was just like aeverybody knew each other. Och, aye, everybody knew each other, it was a good place to work.

Q. Was the social life quite good at that time?

GB Well, our social life.....as far as the pit was concerned, it was alright, but you know, it was an awful place to work, they kept a hold of you, if you were working in it on your Saturday backshift, you were kept to half past seven, there were no early louses or anything like that. Oh, that was before the war I'm talking about! But they never restricted, ken, likes of now, you've got all these amendments now, they try to suit the workers now, but there was no suiting the workers then, you would either do it or you weren't there.

Q. Did you ever have any reasons.....or the Company didn't have any reasons to say anything like that to you?

GB No, no.

GB So, you left and you went back to the coal mining? After you left....

- Q. Why did you leave?.....You actually left when 35 closed?
- GB Aye.....the men.....I was away.....35 went two years after I left, because the men.....drifting away. As the men were drifting away, that was less money, and they couldn't afford a checkweighman. You see, that was less money, and they couldn't.....so they agreed for us to... that was me finished, ken, paid! You know, the men argued, they want you, but then they didn't want you, you see.
- Q. They couldn't afford you?
- GB They couldn't afford you; And then I had to go too!
- Q. And didn't you get an offer to go anywhere else, for the Scottish Oils?
- GB No, no.
- Q. Of course, not being employed directly by them, would have helped.
- GB All them that left didn't get any work from Scottish Oils. Likes of Archie Pate and all them. I mean I thought that Robert Crichton could have used the men for his Grangemouth, ken, could have absorbed them, as they gradually shut. I mean, you were only, they kept you there, and that was it, you were away, you were out! See, they went there for the work boys, went to Grangemouth, likes of Winchburgh Work, or Broxburn Work, or (inaudible).
- Q. And do you feel that the miners got a raw deal?
- GB I would have thought that....after all, it was the men in the shale that was keeping the.....open as far as Grangemouth was concerned, it was these boys that was keeping it.....but they just kept it going as long as it suited themselves. To me, anyway!
- Q. And how did the miners that were left.....after you left, how did they get on without a checkweighman?
- GB Well, they just had to take what the pitheadman gave them! There were no arguments, there was nobody to stick up for them, you see, they just had to take what they got! Jimmy,..... it was Jimmy Cook, he was a

great boy, Jimmy!

Q. Now, Champfleurie, does that.....ring a bell with you.....?

GB Oh, that's away before our time that. That's ower here!

Q. Was their any relations of yours worked in Champfleurie?

GB Oh, I expect there would be. I would expect that my grandfather would have worked there, I suppose.

Q. I'm talking about the big house.

GB Oh, at Champfleurie. Oh there was none in that! My wife worked in Champfleurie!

Q. And what did she do?

GB She was just a maid, ken, a house maid, or whatever they cry it.

Q. But she would know the occupants quite well, the residents.....

GB Aye she worked there about ten years or something.

Q. Did you have any photographs or anything.....?

GB No.....

Q. Was she married when she worked there?

GB Aye she worked there for about a year after.....well, hardly a year, she worked, ken, a wee while after we married.

Q. And is there anything else that you can add about your mining.....with the Scottish Oils?

GB No, there's not much I can add..... that's about all

Q. What would you say the different conditions if there were any, between coal mining and shale mining?

GB Well, I would say that the shale mining was hard work, ken, I mean as far as facemen and drawers were concerned. But you must remember that when we left the pit, they were introducing eh, electric boring machines, you see, at that time there were all hand boring machines, but just the last two years, they were introducing electric machines, ken, electric borers.....and that made an awful difference in the pit, ken. You take it, a rickety.....it took you as long for to bore one hole or two

but with these things you could just.....ken electric....just in the latter stages, they introduced the.....

Q. But that would increase their production?

GB That would increase.....but of course they would get less percentage for the ton, ken, if you get it easier one way, they take it off you the other way. Oh aye, they would get more production, right enough.

Q. In other words, you couldn't win?

GB Oh aye, you couldn't win! You couldn't win! Oh they seemed to do alright. I wasn't in it all the time, with the..... they were just introducing electric borers there and electricity into the pit. You see there was no electricity, well, there was always electricity in it, but not for the boring like, for boring holes.

Q. And was the working face in the coal, compared to the shale.....was there more restrictions in coal.....?

GB Well, you see, the coal's worked in a different style altogether, ken, the likes of shale was stoop and room, you worked so long.....you worked to a certain bit, ken, you just took it out, but the likes of the coal you worked with the facelines, about three hundred feet long, and the machine goes up on the top of the conveyor and strikes the coal out, och, there's no comparison. It's a bigger concern than what the shale was! But of course they were going in for mass production....with all the modern machinery.

Q. So they were just starting their modernisation were they....when the shale was almost closing?

GB Oh aye, that was right!

Q. Coal was a bit ahead?

GB Oh aye, they were ahead! Of course, the coal was always ahead, they had machinery, ken, faceline pans and machines for cutting coal, och, when I left the coal.....before I came through here, ken, they had all mechanised.....not to the great extent that it is now.

Q. And when you worked on the coal, before you came to the shale, what was the difference then?

GB Well, you see, you had your facework there, you had pans, you stripped so much coal and you got.....every man got his own stint, but you had your pans running up and down, it was just a case of turning your full coal into the pans, and it was taken away, you see what I mean, you had either to take chains or "shaker" pans, what they cried "jigger" pans.

Q. Was this even before the war, in the coal.....?

GB Oh aye,!

Q. That they had all that equipment.....?

GB Oh aye.....belts....I worked in Rosslyn and Whinrigg and Burlea and Loanhead, when they introduced the first belts into there, you know, that's the belts too, you could say that was 1937, you know what I mean.

Q. Would you say that it was a dirtier job, in the coal, than the shale?

GB Oh, I believe it was, aye! It was a dirtier job!

Q. And washing facilities, had you any at all in the coal.....?

GB Oh aye, you had baths and that.....

Q. At that time, they were ahead of the shale, for baths?

GB Oh aye, but Niddry had baths there, but it was off the road, it was alright if you were on your road coming the way....we went back the way. Oh aye, they were in front, well, the baths was.....in 1935, introduced to Rosewell.

Q. That was in the coal?

GB In the coal, aye!

Q. And wage comparison! When you left the coal, to start in the shale, was it better?

GB Well, at that time, it was about a shilling a difference, with the Company wage rate, ken, I think the shale was 9/- or something and it was only eight was the minimum wage like, the shale was about a shilling above the coal.....

Q. And you've no other experience that you could.....?

GB No, no!

Q.would like to talk about?

END OF TAPE

TRANSCRIPT Mr GB

Industrial Information

I started my working life at Rosslyn and Rosewell in the pits. I worked there for five years I then started in no. 35 pit in 1938 in the drawing I got this job when a fella lost his job.

Checkweighman

I then got the job a checkweighman at no. 35 pit, when a chap called Geordie McGee retired from the job, and I got the job after a vote with another chap called Geordie Crawford The men thought I would stick up for their interests.

Boards

You had a board for each man, and the had different kinds of pins, and the pithead-boy puts them on (the pins) and you knew who they belonged to. You just watched it was right when he weighed it to see it was done right. I have seen sometimes the pit-headman thinking the hutches were to heavy. He could tell this because some shale was lighter than others, and the pithead they had a wooden structure which was altered to steel, but this only lasted a short time. I was only on that job for six months when this happened.

Drawer

I then went back to my old job as a drawer. I was working with the wife's father

Drawers Duties

The job involved filling your hutches and took the wood in, took the material ken the wood material for his roofing and it was your responsibility filling the shale and taking it away. and giving him assistance, giving the faceman any assistance that was available No. 35 closed two years after I left because the men were drifting away

Differences between

I would say that shale mining was hard work, ken, as far as a faceman and a drawer was concerned. You must remember that when we left the pit, they were introducing electric boring machines, you see, at that time they had all hand boring machines but over the last two years, they were introducing

electric machines, electric borers,
and that made an awful difference.
they were just starting to modernise
when the shale mines were closing.

Accidents

There were two or three accidents
Jimmy Jarvie was killed, he was from
Uphall. There was Willie MO Cormack
and Dally Finniegan. Dally Finniegan
fired his shot and he went back, you
know, and it just blazed up and he
must have inhaled it. I don't think
he lasted a week after he was taken to
hospital.

My Accident

That was breaking a bit of shale that
was too heavy, I'd to break it up a bit
and a bit floated up and hit me in the
eye. It was a filled splinter. I didn't
lose my eye right away, but I lost it
after some years, ken the pain was
that severe, in the daylight the light
affected it

Compensation Union

I got some, but not very much.
Hughie Breslin, Jimmy Orswell were
the big ones in the unions at that
time. By rights I should have rep-
resented the men, but I never got
into that.

Grievances

I've never heard of any grievances
with the union's bar it was the thing
they didn't pay the men, you know, say
likes of the man along the road, and
he could not draw enough to pay
himself, ken the make up pay.

Wages

You got the basic wage, and it was
just your luck what kind of face you
had how much money you earned. I thought
the easier you worked, the better the
job you had the more money you had. I
had had a job for a while and I had
good money, I was working with my
wife's father at the time.

Domestic Life Housing

The miners rows were done away with
and a new scheme was built a combination
between the Cavil and Bridgend. They
built large houses, and there were
people who worked in the Winchburgh
works, they were council houses.

Social Life

The social life as far as the pit
was concerned was quite good, if you
were working on Saturday backshift
you were kept until half past seven
so you didn't have much time, as
there were no early louses or anything
like that.