

GF TAPE ONE SIDE ONE F.I.

Q. What time did you start?

GF When I was 15, that would be 1951/52, and I worked till it closed.
That would be 1962.

Q. Where did you start?

GF I started in Burngrange at West Calder. When it closed I went to
Hermand. When Hermand eventually closed I went to Westwood. When
Westwood finally closed, there was nowhere left to go after that!

Q. How did you get started, were your family in it? (Mining)

GF Aye, my father was a miner before me, and one of my brothers was
In Burngrange at that time. In West Calder there wasn't anything
else, you either went to the pit or you travelled to Edinburgh, there
was more money working locally in the pits, I mean, once you'd paid
your bus fare there wasn't much left.

Q. What were you doing, were you just on the pit bottom?

GF You start on the surface, just as it is in the coal pits just now,
and you gradually work down the pit, start at the pit bottom and
gradually work away from it. When you're 18 you start on the drawing,
which is filling the hutches at the face. You made your own wages
after that.

Q. Were you still being paid on production?

GF Aye. When you went to the face, when you were 18 you started on the
drawing, there was a team, in Burngrange there was a faceman and two
drawers on either shift. You got a ton rate. Everybody had a different
ton rate depending on the conditions under which they were working, and

you made your own wage. It was around 7/6d a ton at that time, which was divided among the 4, they were three in each shift, the faceman, he actually bored and blasted, the two drawers, they filled the shale you know.

Q. How much did you expect to make in a week?

GF The wages were quite good. At that time - average - you had two different weeks, because you had a 5 day and 5 ½ day week, you worked one Saturday every fortnight at that time. You had a bigger wage one week than the other week. On average about £20 per week at that time, which was really good. But you were working hard. It was a short day, but you never stopped from when you went down and you stripped off and just had a vest on. It could be warm.

Q. Was it quite warm underground?

GF Aye, the further away you were from the pit bottom. You know, the air comes down at the pit bottom, it goes through a series of tunnels, and as you go through the tunnels it naturally gets warmer, because it's getting buffeted off the sides all the time and that's heating the air, and the further you're away, the warmer it becomes, virtually. The older the pit gets, the further away, the warmer it gets.

Q. Was there any trouble with water at Burngrange?

GF Not really, no. I wouldn't say there wasn't any trouble with water at Burngrange. It all depends on the geology of the underneath earth. It goes up in waves and comes out in a basin, so at Burngrange it was on one of these hills that runs down the way so virtually the water's all running away from here you know? You can get a pump, and you don't have any problem with water. If you were mining down and coming to the basin, it's lying there, and you would need to pump it from where you're working. There wasn't any problem in Burngrange, but there was more water in Westwood. Virtually because I think they were older workings round about it and up above and you

were drawing the water from the older workings. Westwood was a bigger pit, older as well, they had three seams there, shale working in Westwood, Dunnet, Broxburn and Fells. But Hermand and Burngrange, they just had the one seam. The seams go one up above. You went down Westwood pit, some went down the way to work, some went up the way, just to work the different seams.

Q. What about gas?

GF There wasn't really any, just occasionally, but nothing..... you could smoke down all the shale pits, there wasn't any problems. I say that tongue in cheek, because we'd a disaster at Burngrange before I worked there, which was caused by gas, but that was before my time. I don't know too much about it, but I think it was maybe bad ventilation had more to do with it than anything else.

Q. What about fumes from the blasting?

GF That was a problem. Again, the further away you were, the less air you had, and the longer it took to clear. The virtue of making your own wages, you tended to go in when maybe you shouldn't have, you know before it was right you know nowadays, people working on the surface, they wouldn't do these sort of things, you were making your own money, and because of that you had virtually little management. When you talk about gas, when I say that there was none, you checked 3 or 4 times a day for gas. You had a Glennie lamp, we called them, a Davie safety lamp was the right name, but you carried one all the time and you checked for gas 2 or 3 times a day. But there wasn't any problem.

Q. What sort of shifts were you working and how long were the shifts?

GF When you started it was an 8 hour shift, and you gradually came down to about 7 ½ hours. Again when I say that, that's from when you leave the pit head until you come back to the pit head, because again it can maybe take you ½ hour or ¾ hour to get to your work after you went down the pit. You'd transport to get you most of the way, but you had to walk a bit.

Q. Roughly how far would you be going?

GF It's a difficult question, because it's hard to know how far you're travelling underground. I would say up to a mile, I don't know, you never travelled much further than that.

Q. You're not old enough to know about Company houses?

GF Not really. I did have a Company house, that's why I came to Livingston Station to start with.

Q. Were these still Company houses at that time?

GF Not here, in the Main Street. I came from Polbeth, and Effie, my wife, came from Newbridge, and we worked in Westwood, and we got a miner's row house up in the Main Street. They were eventually taken over by the Corporation and demolished. A lot of people say the Corporation should have kept them and retained them. They were basically quite good houses, and quite sound. I think the Corporation demolished them at the time because the rents in these houses were comparatively cheap.

Q. How much were you paying?

GF Eventually I think it was about 10/6d a week compared to £5 a week when we moved in here. That's an awful lot of money..... I don't think the Corporation wanted the two levels of housing. When we moved into the Main Street in 1960, I think the rent was only 3/6d, that was quite cheap. Before my time you had free electricity and one thing and another, that came from the Deans works, the Roman Camps were for Broxburn. They had their own power station. It was only meant for lighting. People started to use cookers and different things, and the lights were fusing every night. But that was before I came. We went on to the Grid.

Q. In the 1960's were there inside toilets then?

GF Yes. In Livingston Station you had inside toilets and bathrooms away back in the 1930's, we were civilised! The other Scottish Oil houses in different places may not have had bathrooms but they all had inside toilets. They didn't have them originally, they were additions that were built on.

Q. Were all the repairs still being done by the Company at that time?

GF Aye, very much so. We didn't have the problems that they have today, because Scottish Oil had tradesmen, they were here all the time and basically they had a hut at.....it was North Street at that time, just across from where the Co-op is, and we just went up there and the joiner and the plumber..... if it was an emergency you knew where he lived. He would come out through the night.

Q. Was that done free, or was there any charge?

GF Done free.

Q. Was the Union strong in the shale mine?

GF We had a Union, we were in a Union. I wouldn't say that they were strong, because there was never any strikes, away before my time about 1921 or 3 or something, that was really the only strike they had, which was national, rather than anything to do with the shale mines, but the fact that you made your own wages and a big percentage, I would say about 70 or 80 of the people that worked in the pit made their own wages, made above average, so you didn't have the problems, plus the fact that for years and years and years, whether they were or not, Scottish Oils always maintained that they were pleading poverty and it worked, because you thought, well, what's the good, they've not got any money anyway! I don't suppose....you know how company's issue Balance Sheets and whatnot now. if they did at that time, maybe I was younger, I didn't realise it, but if they were making money it was never obvious. They were always pleading poverty. The wages, as I say, were above average and you made your own wages and you never had any

problems like that. The term "shop steward" was never really known in the pit. A thing about working in the pit as well. Every time you went down the pit and you got to your work, there were normally only two or three of you working together, you didn't have a lot of time to.....you know in factories you have more time to talk together and all the rest of it - sometimes problems with unions and one thing and another come out of that - you didn't have a lot of - you were in the pit at work and you didn't hack up schemes to beat the management!

Q. What about things like being in the Orange Lodge or the Masons? Anything like that? Did that help you get on?

GF Well you always had the same amount in these things as we had. In Livingston Station we had every sort of group, you know, we didn't have a Masonic Lodge until 1962. Until that time there was a lot of people in the Masons, they went to Mid Calder, Broxburn, Bathgate. A lot of reasons for, in Livingston lodge in particular, people worked shifts, they couldn't always be there at set times and that was why they went to all those different places.

Q. It wasn't an especially popular thing?

GF I wouldn't say it was as popular as it is today, but there were a lot of people in it. In Scottish Oil days we had more organisations per head than anywhere else in Scotland. In Livingston Station here, we had every conceivable organisation that you want to mention, you know, women and men. They always had a bowling club, because Scottish Oils provided these facilities, and also we had a lot of the other organisations as well because we had first class hall accommodation, which we've still got now. It was provided by the Oil company. The reason we had an Orange Lodge was because away back in the early days they went at different times to Ireland to recruit labour, and sometimes when they were needing it, and sometimes because they would work for a wee bit cheaper than some of us did. But there was always a great harmony between all these different groups. It wasn't unknown for the Orange Lodge to have a dance on the Saturday night, and when they were finished, to set out the chairs for the chapel in the morning, and

vice versa. It worked here for years and years before there was a New Town.

Q. Was there much gambling, card schools?

GF They always had card schools it wasn't as bad here as it was say in Broxburn or Bathgate, you know, where they had the pitch and toss schools, with hundreds turning up on a Sunday, but you always had the one or two who'd play cards, and they used to have them outside. I don't know how it worked, but I don't think you could run card school outside nowadays! They had them inside at different times and in peoples houses, but I wouldn't say that there was any problem. The Scottish Oil, they never allowed licenses, so it wasn't until after Scottish Oils were on the decline that there was a pub in Livingston Station, or Pumpherston, or any of the places that they controlled completely. They had a big interest at Broxburn but they didn't control it completely. But here 98% of the houses belonged to Sottish Oils. When you were saying about being in the Orange Lodge and different things, it helped you get on at your work. Away back, again I am listening to old miners talking, the Hall or Community Centre as it is today it's still run - although the Education run it, it is still managed here locally with a Committee of people - when the Scottish Oils owned it, they started that as well and a lot of folk used to think it would be advantageous to be on the Hall Management Committee, the Company approved the people that were on it to such an extent that there was quite a demand for places on it. Big crowds turned up to vote on different people to the Hall Management Committee, it was quite different in these days. The Hall was the centre of the Community. They had billiards and everything, the Bowling green in the summer, the Reading Room in the Library.

Q. Did they have a Library in Livingston?

Q. Was that only for the use of the Scottish Oil employees? Could people who didn't work for the Company pay so much and get the use of them?

GF Aye, we didn't really have that problem here, because there wouldn't be a family who didn't work for Scottish Oil anyway. We all paid 1d off our wages, then it went up to 2d. I think it was 3d before I finally finished, but that was just paid off our wages. They were quite good in those days, in fact they still do it here as yet. Anybody that wasn't behaving as they should be, they were barred from using the facilities, depending on the offence, for maybe weeks to months or to years, and it was quite a thing if you were barred from the Hall, because where else did you go in those days?

Q. Was there a lot of rivalry between the different mining villages?

GF Aye, when it came to football and things like that. We always liked to beat Seafield just along the road, we normally did, a sporting rivalry. When I played bowls, I think Seafield's our nearest one, because with the works and the pit, here and Seafield normally worked together and to play the football teams and the bowls and whatnot, to beat Seafield was Rangers/Celtic stuff! As I say, we normally managed to beat them! About the houses as well, there was a thing that when you worked for Scottish Oils you were in a tied house, you just couldn't leave because where else would you live? There wasn't a lot of Council houses at that time. It was tied in more ways than one, because you were tied to your job, and because you couldn't risk getting the sack or anything like that because it wasn't just your job, it was your house.

Q. When it all closed down, what happened to the houses, were they all sold off?

GF They offered them to sitting tenants, some bought them. The Corporation eventually took them over. Finally when anybody was still living there they belonged to the Corporation. Again to go back to the original days, the houses were fair, some had attic bedrooms, but the majority were just a living room, kitchen, bathroom and one bedroom. I think that they could have been made two into one, as they've done in Pumpherston. Quite nice wee cottage type houses. I think it would have been quite nice to have retained them.

Q. Was there a lot of people moved out of the village after all the pits shut down?

GF Not really, because in many ways we were very fortunate, because that was when the B.M.C. came. It couldn't have been nicer. The pits closed down in 1962. I think the B.M.C. came in 1961. The build up was gradual, there were very few people unemployed for very long. It was a different type of work, but most people.....Well, it was easier work anyway, cleaner work. The shale pits were quite clean, to the degree that - they weren't like coal mines, the shale seams are much taller, the lowest seam I ever worked was six feet, and that was the Broxburn. In the Dunnet and Burngrange they were up to about fourteen feet high, but there was quite a difference, you weren't lying about on your belly in dross and water sort-of-style!

Q. Was there much difference between working on different seams?

GF Aye, just in the heights! Again, when the waves, geological conditions you know, they go to a basin. Gradually when you get down to near the bottom of the basin, it gets steeper, and it could be quite steep at bits, and would be more difficult to work. If you were going up the way and it was steep, you know, when you blasted everything naturally came down and you had rails there, it just blew everything, the trees you had to hold up the roof, it was more difficult, and even if you were going in the opposite way to the basin going against it, the bit you were going in at would be like that, everything fell down to the bottom, it was more difficult to shovel.....The pavement, by that I mean the ground, if it wasn't smooth it was more difficult to shovel off, it was like going outside, the difference between shovelling off those concrete slabs and something rough.. You could fill 10 times as much shale off a good pavement than you could if it was uneven. When it came to blasting the shale, if you didn't have a man who could do it well, you were struggling. You couldn't make a wage. But that was how everybody had a different ton rate. Because the conditions were all different. There were some places where you could make money and other places where you couldn't make much, and obviously you had to get a higher ton rate. It

generally worked out O.K. The under manager, he knew who could do it. We never had much trouble with the Union fixing ton rates. You used to get a bonus for a wee while. If you had a high ton rate because you had bad conditions and they got gradually better, you could score. He seen it when he made your money, at the end of the week he'd say "Oh aye" ! The wages you made.... it seemed to balance out quite well.

Q. With working in a team was there ever complaints about men not pulling their weight?

GF Aye, you often got that, but it sorted itself out. I mean, you weren't going to work with somebody that wasn't pulling their weight and you gradually got rid of him. Away back, again before my time, you had contractors, they just didn't pay them. I didn't work under contractors. If there was somebody in your team who wasn't pulling his weight you would go and see the under manager and you would tell him, and if it was a reasonably good team he wasn't going to have the team wasted, he was there to get shale. You normally found that the ones who didn't pull their weight, they gradually found that they were working together. It sorted out the weak from the (?)

Q. So that was what you did, you went and complained to the undermanager?

Q. You couldn't get rid of him yourself?

GF No, not at that time. Normally you got him, because if he wasn't going to do it, you weren't going to do it, and nobody was going to do it. I never had any problem.

GF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

GF If there was 6 of you working in a team, you had to buy your own explosives, and you'd to buy your own equipment, your shovels and picks, the drills that you used as well. More especially the bits you put on the end of the drills for boring holes, they were quite expensive because they were diamond studded, and you had to buy them as well.

Q. Did you ever hear of anyone getting drills or other tools from the coalminers, for nothing?

GF We didn't get them for nothing, we used to buy them from the coalminers, because they got them for nothing.

Q. Was there much of that went on?

GF Quite a lot, actually. We used to buy them ourselves. A drill or bit that was maybe £2 or 30/-, we were getting it for 10/-. Value for money!

Q. How often did you have to replace them?

GF Well again it depends on the seam that you were working. You had quite a lot of them, we had to get them sharpened, about twice a week of something. We had to replace them quite regularly. If you had shale, you could come across a stone or odd bits, curly, shale is normally slaty but for some reason or another it was rolled into a ball, to go through that was quite difficult and that knocked hell out of your drill.

Q. It was electric drills by the time you started?

GF Aye.

Q. Were they worked off batteries?

GF No, it was electricity that was led down to the workings.

Q. So you didn't need to pay for batteries then?

GF No.

Q. What about explosives, can you remember how much explosives were?

GF To buy? No, because it's not as if you....it just came off your wage, it was just a figure for the whole week you know. I can't even mind what the figure was. If it was higher that week.....
Somebody that was good at blasting shale could save you an awful lot of money, because if somebody used up more explosives than they should and different things like that it took away a lot of your wages, just to get the right amount. If you knew where to bore the holes, it's quite important, there's quite an art in mining. Some could do it and were good at it. It worked that some people were working hard and making less money. Compared to the good miners who could blast the shale and always had plenty there for you, if you were a good drawer and you had somebody blasting the shale for you and they weren't blasting enough you were toiling.

Q. Did you ever go on to blasting?

GF Well, aye, I did it just when people were on holiday and different things like that, I was never on it full time because.....it was after a number of years, if the pits had gone on longer, maybe I would have, not long after they closed, never, not full time. When people weren't out, or someone away on holidays, I did it then.

Q. What kind of holidays did you get?

GF At that time you got a fortnight in the summer and two days at New Year. You always worked at Christmas, Christmas wasn't a holiday, that was National, it wasn't just in the pits.

Q. Did the pits shut down at New Year altogether?

GF Aye, the pits weren't like the Oil Works, they had to keep going because they couldn't loose the heat, but the pits were quite different, other than the safety coverage like you hear them talking about in the Coal mines now. Firemen going down and testing for gas and different things, and water, keep the pumps going, and the fans to keep the air circulating.

Transcript

GF

Industrial
Information

I started work when I was fifteen in Burngrange Pit, West Calder. I started on the surface just like the coal puts. You gradually worked your way down the pit.

Filling Hutches

When I was eighteen I started drawing, which was just filling the hutches at the face. The faceman actually bored and blasted and the two drawers filled the shale.

Wages as a Draper

You got a ton rate, and everybody had a different ton rate depending on which they were working. It was around 7/6d a ton at that time, which was divided among four. At that time you had two different weeks, because you had a five day and a five and a half day week, and you worked one Saturday

in every fortnight at that time. You had a bigger wage one week than the other. On average your wage was around £20 per week at that time.

Shifts

There were three on each shift. That was the faceman who bored and blasted, and the two drawers.

Conditions

The further away , you were from the pit bottom the air was warmer, because it went through a series of tunnels and it got warmer, because it was buffeted off the sides all the time and that heated the air. There wasn't any trouble with water at Burngrange, as it was on one of these hills, so the water was running away.

Westwood

Westwood was a bigger pit and older as well. They had three seams at Westwood, Dunnet, Broxburn and Fells.

Herman & Burngrange

Herman and Burngrange just had one seam.

Shifts

When you started it was an eight hour shift, and you gradually came down to about 7 ½ hours, that was when you leave the pithead until you come back to the pithead, because it can maybe take ½ hour to ¾ hour to get to your work after you went down the pit.

Underground

You had transport to get most

Transport	of the way, but you would have about a mile to walk as well.
Gas	There wasn't really any. You could smoke down the shale pits, and there wasn't any problem. Because we had a disaster at Burngrange before I worked there, which was caused by gas, which I think was bad ventilation more than anything else. Fumes From Blasting The fumes from blasting was a problem. The further away you were the less air you had, and the longer it took to clear.
Glennie Lamp	You had a glennie lamp, and you checked three or four times a day for gas. You carried one all the time and you checked for gas two or three times a day, but there wasn't any problem.
Difference of Seams	The difference in the seams was just in the heights. When the waves, Geological conditions, they would go to a basin. Gradually, when you got near the bottom of the basin it got steeper and it would be more difficult to work. If you were going up the way it was steep. When you blasted everything naturally came down and you had rails, it just blew everything. It was more difficult to shovel off, it was like going outside the difference between shovelling off concrete slabs and something rough.

Filling & Blasting Shale

You could fill ten times as much shale off a good pavement than you could by your own explosives. Your shovels and picks, and the drills that you used as well. The bits that you put on the end of drills for boring the holes were quite expensive because they were diamond studded, but you had to buy them ourselves,

Cost of Diamond Drills & Replacements

A drill or bit that maybe cost 30/- or £2, we were getting it for 10/-. It depended on the seam that you were working on. You had quite a lot of them, we had to get them sharpened about twice a week, and we had to replace them quite regularly. If you had shale you could come across a stone or odd bits, curly shale is normally slaty, and for some reason it rolled into a ball and to go through it was quite difficult. They were electric drills, and the electricity was led down to the workings.

Unions

We had a Union, but I wouldn't say it was strong, because there was never any strikes. Sometimes problems with the unions came out, but you didn't have a lot, because you were in the pit to work and you didn't back up schemes to beat the management.

Holidays

At that time you got a fortnight in the summer and two days at

New Year. You always worked Christmas, as it wasn't a holiday. That was a national holiday. The pits and the oilworks had to be kept going because you could lose the heat in the oilworks.

Firemen

The firemen used to go down and test for gas and keep the pumps going during the holidays

Domestic Life
Housing

I came from Polbeth, and Effie, my wife, came from Newbridge, and we worked in Westwood. We got a miner's row house up in Main Street. They were eventually taken over by the Corporation and demolished. In Livingston Station we had inside toilets and bathrooms away back in the 1930's. The other Scottish Oil houses in different places may not have had bathrooms but they all had inside toilets. They didn't have them originally they were additions that were built on. There wasn't a lot of Council houses at that time. It was tied housing, because you were tied to your job, and you couldn't risk getting the sack because it wasn't just your job it was your house. When the oilworks closed down they offered the houses to sitting tenants.

Size of Houses

In the original days the houses were fair. Some had attic bedrooms, but the majority had

just a living room, kitchen,
bathroom and one bedroom.

Electricity

Before my time you had free electricity, that came from the Deams work. Broxburn got their power from Roman Camps, they had their own power station. It was only meant for lighting, but people started to use cookers and different things, and the lights fused every night, before we went on the grid.

Rent

Eventually I think it was about 10/6d a week when we moved here. That was an awful lot of money. When we changed houses the rent was £5. In Main Street in 1960 the rent was only 3/6d, which was quite cheap.

Domestic Life

They always had a bowling club, which Scottish Oils provided.

Card Schools

They always had card schools with hundreds turning up on Sundays.

Community Hall

The community hall is still run today, it is still managed locally by a Committee of people. When Scottish Oils owned it a lot of folk used to think it would be advantageous to be on the Management Hall Committee, and the Company approved the people that were on it to such an extent that there was quite a demand for places on it. Big crowds turned up to vote on different

people on to the Management Committee. The hall was the centre of the community.

Library

They had a library with a reading room in it, but it was only for the use of Scottish Oil employees. We all paid 1d off our wages, then it went to 2d. I think it was about 3d when I finished.

Behaviour

Anybody who didn't behave was barred from using the facilities maybe for weeks to months or to years. It was quite a thing if you were barred from the hall, because where else did you go in those days.

Closure of Pits

The pits closed down in 1961.

CONTENTS

B.M.C. : 9.
Batteries : 11.
Blaster/ing : 1,3,9,11.
Bowls : 7,8.
Broxbum shale : 2,9.
Card Schools : 7
Christmas/New Year : 12.
Community Centre : 7.
Contractors : 10.
Drawer/ing : 1,2,11.
Disaster ; 3
Dunnet shale : 2,9.
Electricity : 4.
Explosives : 11.
Faceman : 1.
Fells Shale : 2.
Football : 8.
Gas : 3
Glennie Lamp : 3.
Houses : 4,8,9.
Hutches : 1.
Masons : 6.
Orange Lodge : 6.
Pits : 1,2,5,6,12.
Pitch and Toss : 7.
Production : 1.
Pumps : 2.
Rails : 9.
Rent ; 4.
Seams : 2,9.
Shale : 2,3,9,11.
Shifts : 3,6.
Team : 10,11.

Ton rate : 1,10.

Transport : 3

Union : 5, 6.

Wages : 1,2,3,5,8

Water : 2.

PLACE INDEX

Bathgate: 6,7.

Broxburn: 6,7.

Burngrange: 1,2,9.

Edinburgh: 1.

Herrand: 1,2.

Livingston Station: 3,6,7.

Mid Calder: 6.

Newbridge: 3.

Polbeth: 3.

Pumphreston: 7,9.

Seafeld: 8.

West Calder : 1.

Westwood: 1,2.