

GJ/HP SIDE ONE

A. Well, as a young man of fourteen years of age, it was my great pleasure to get a job in the Scottish Oilfields, you know, and I ran from Addiewell Work, it was a Tuesday morning, and I came to my mother and I says, 'That's me got a job!' 'I've got to go out tonight!' That's how I started! So, an hour before I was due to go, I'd get myself ready with my hat and lamp, my carbide lamp, and all the boys that I ran about with were outside the door, standing waiting on me, and they accompanied me along the road to my work. And nowadays they wouldn't allow you to start on the nightshift at fourteen years old!

GC What year was this?

A. It was 1930! And the month was June 1930! When I went down the pit first! And this old man that took me down was a.....he was called Mr. Potter, and we were going down in this cage, it went down the slope.

GC Which mine was this?

A. Twenty Six Mine! Oh, I didn't know anything about the rope at the back of the cages, you see, so we were going down, and he says, 'Now then, Geordie, I'm going to stop this machine here!' So, he puts his foot on this thing, and the thing automatically stops, and I don't know how he did it or not to let the men off, to what they called Eighteen Bench, so went further down, and it stopped again at Twenty Four Bench, and the next thing we landed on the pit bottom, and it was all lit up.... 'Oh' I says, 'This is great!' So that was me settled there. But you know, I had to walk about a mile and a half before I got to my job! That night!

GC Is that right?

A. That's the God's truth! I landed out.....very near Stoneyburn..... you know the bridge that's.....how far..... that's what they called the main waste, and

I was going up braes and down braes, and all here and all there. What kind of thing is this, a pit, you know!

GC Who was the Manager? That started you.....?

A. Then! It was Borland.....Tam Borland!

GC And was it him that gave you the job or.....?

A. He gave me the job, aye!

GC And did your parents.....did your father work in the mines?

A. Aye.....he was a.....he was just a labourer in the pithead, you know.

GC But he didn't influence you at all?

A. No, no, he never! No! You see, there was nothing else for us then, but the pits, and as I said the Scottish Oils had the command of the workers, because there was no other industry in the place! None what- soever! So you had to go the shale! Either that or go to the Army or something or.....you know....so....

GC And what job did you do when you were in Twenty Six?

A. And well, as I told.....a chain runner. I was supplying the men with the hutches, maybe you were waiting for a rake to get put in, for to fill it, you see, and then I put the empty rake in and then I took the full rake out, and this is how you carried on, you see! Then I eventually got a job, I was pit bottomer, ken, in that in Burngrange Pit, I went to it in 1941.

GC And how long were you in Twenty Six? How long did you work there?

A. Twenty Six! I was in from 1930 to 1941!

GC And were you a chain runner all the time?

A. No! I did a wee bit of.....what do you call it, a roadsman.....what they called a roadsman, you laid rails and that, and then I was a pit bottomer.....in Burngrange Pit.

GC So, you then went to Burngrange?

A. Aye!

GC And that would be.....?

A. 1941!

GC 1941?

A. And then I graduated from there down into the main sections again, you see, and I was made a cleekhunter, what you called a cleekhunter, I had to hunt the laddies on, and here's one of my boys sitting over here, HP. You used to hunt them on, if they weren't doing their work, you see! 'They're off the road, out here!' Right, you ran out, put it on the road, 'We're off the road in here!' You were off your head, running back and forward! (Inaudible) Me and this silly Davie Brown, the man that the gaffer, Davy Brown, aye! We were 'wrought to death' looking after the laddies, putting hutches off the road, and putting them on!

GC So, this was a regular occurrence?

A. Aye! HP/Just when you's were twisting.....!

GC And what do you mean by that? Was that intentional? HP/They were trying to force us/They were trying to force you to do more, you see, and then the gaffer introduced a wee scheme, beat the record! Well, say thirty six..... thirty six rakes, and the boys would always have one up their sleeve you see! They were always getting a bit half

shift every now and again from the gaffer, for breaking this record, you see!

GC And who was it that paid you, was it the Company?

A. The Company paid me, aye!

GC You were oncost?

A. I was oncost, yes, I went and got my pay from the Company! The likes of Harold there, when he went to the drawing, it was a man that paid him, you see! Harold Purse/No, it was the Company then too/Was it?/ ..HP/Well, it was a pool! A pool system! I ken of that, before me + ? went to the drawing, the faceman paid the drawer! But then when.....I think that it had started a while before I went. When I went on, it was the pool system, backshift and the dayshift, all got the same, firemen actually got half a crown extra on their shift, but I think that was for carrying powder, wasn't it?That's all that I can mind of anyway!/Aye!

GC What other jobs did you do at Burngrange?

A. Oh, that was all, I just.....I was a chain runner, pit bottom, and I was on the roads, I was a roadsman, and I had.....well, of course, I had to learn my trade then, you see, you had to.....you had to be able to splice ropes and lay crossings and maybe lay a cuddie, what they called a cuddie, you've heard of a cuddie, so you've maybe had to do those kind of jobs!

GC Now, who was the Manager at Burngrange?

A. Eh.....what do you call him.....Archie Russell was the Under-Manager and McArthur, John McArthur was the Manager. And then we had John Stein above him again! And then.....who was the wee man..... there was another Manager came after Borland.....oh, what was his name... he was killed, he left here and he was killed going down to England! Do you mind of that, Harold? I just can't mind of his name just now! But some of these other boys might be able to tell you! He left the Scottish Oils to go to a job in England, and he was killed on the road down! This fella!

GC And were you at Burngrange when the disaster happened?

A. I was working in Burngrange when the disaster happened in 1947!

GC What can you remember about that?

A. Oh well.....

GC Where were you working at the time?

A. I was.....I was what you call a roadsman then, I was laying the roads and that then!

GC And were you working when the actual.....? Actual accident happened?

A. No, I was dayshift when it happened! And I was sitting in West Calder picture house, in Annie Mills' picture house, when everything stopped!

GC That's down Church Brae?

A. Down the Church Brae! And they said here you are, there's a disaster! And do you know what we thought that it was, sitting there! Because the men used to come up at lousing time, on this eight hutch rake, in between the couplings getting a hurl up, and jumping off at the top, we thought that maybe that had broke and.....but here we discovered that it was a big disaster, a big explosion and well.....we ran up to the pit, and there were men up yonder that wanted to get down and they wouldn't let them go down, you see. And oh, it was terrible! Big Martin Gaughan, oh, he was a great miner too, he wanted to go down because his brother was there, you see, and they wouldn't let Martin go down, he had too much of a drink in him, you see, so..... what happened I don't know, but oh.....after that.....

GC There were quite a few miners killed?

A. They weren't actually killed, you know what I mean! If you get my meaning..... there was only one actually killed, the rest were 'fumigated'gassed and that you know! The only one that was killed was a Mr. John McGarty.....and he was taking in this hutch and he was going up this cuddie with a tree on it, for to set when the thing got.....blown to bits.....well, it didn't blow him to bits, but it killed him, you see! And last man that they found was sitting like I am the now! He was sitting like this, it was what you called a screen cloth.....hanger, for to get air into the places, so he saw there was no.....well, he accepted it.....he must have accepted that he was going to die or something, because he had built himself in, he was just sitting like that, he had the pipe in his mouth.....and that was him, just like that! Just went like that!

GC And were they allowed to smoke?

A. No, at certain bits, you were.....some bits you couldn't smoke, you had to come out, you see, they all used to come out at piece-time and sit in this certain place where there was no.....where they knew that there was no gas, and have a smoke there, you see!

GC What kind of lamps did you have in Burngrange? Were they electric?

A. Eh.....some had the carbide and the majority of the facemen had the electric lamps, the cap lamp you're talking about. And that's how they reckoned that that explosion happened! Was a young fellow had a carbide lamp, and his drawer said to him 'Come on, come see this!' Ken..... (inaudible).....seen this, seriously this is what they reckoned put that explosion off, and they never got a scratch, the two of them! They flung themselves to the ground.....and see with an explosion, it's not when it's coming out, it's when it's coming back that it gets you! So.....I don't know!

GC So, do you feel that a naked flame had put that off..... there would be gas in that area?

A. In that area, aye!

GC And he shouldn't have been in there.....with a naked flame?

A. Aye.....but you know, the mistake was.....I don't know much about mind, but they reckon that the mistake was, that they were stooping where they shouldn't have been..... they were stooping inside a developing area, you see! They shouldn't have been doing that at all! Aye, outside it or something, aye! But McArthur would be able to tell you all this! You know, all about it and you know.....and.....I was in after that, when the explosion went off, I was a pumper for a while, looking after the pumps and then I got a job.....along with the brickie, building their walls, eighteen inch wall, for to put the.....and then they put the pipes in for to take samples of gas, you know! Into this wall....

GC Was this sealing off the area?

A. Sealing off the area!

GC The area where the disaster was.....?

A. The area.....sealing off the area that was burnt! You want to have seen the cables, man! The cables in that pit..... they were melting! Armoured cables! With the heat that was in it! The men could only go in for twenty minutes, and then out for twenty minutes. It was the first time ever that there was firemen down the pit! Down any pit! Watering it all the time!

GC So, that wouldn't be a happy experience?

A. Oh, no, no, no! There was a wee fella, there, he was a chain runner, and after that, when he had seen what he had seen, he joined the Fire Brigade, with the Scottish Oils, like, you know! Or with the Coal Boardwee Todd.....wee Sandy Todd! He had seen that much, you know!

GC And this made him leave the.....?

A. Aye..... there was two men killed that night in that explosion! They went to pull their last hutch in and they were going to go home early, and if they hadn't went home early, they would have been saved! They were going to come out the next morning, you see, two fella Carroll's! From Seafield, you see, they were killed, and then there was Jock Lightbody, a laddie Fairley, wee Jimmy McAuley, Tony Gaughan and WullWull eh.....Jock Lightbody.....aye! Wull Greenock, he was the only man that was got by the fire! This Wull Greenock, he was all burnt! The rest were all entombed at the back.....

GC So, he got out alive?

A. No, no!

GC He got past the fire, but he still died?

A. He still died, aye!

GC But he got burned with.....with the result of the burns?

A. There was a man that died that night, too! It was the first Friday night, the first backshift that ever he had worked in Burngrange, he always took a Friday night off, that was Henry Cowie, and he went out this night, and it was just fate, he died that night! In that explosion!

GC And no doubt there would be an inquest? Into this?

A. Och, aye! There was a big inquest into that! But they didn't..... they didn't go to the law or anything as far as compensation and that was concerned, I think that the Scottish Oils accepted all the blame, you see! That's as far as I know, you know! HP/They had a fund going. Aye, they had a fund going too, aye! But oh.....and then the waste..... the waste that they did, ken, the Scottish Oils were really good to the people that were fighting for to get these men out and that, and the food that they gave them and they were just taking the best of the food and flinging the rest away, you know! Destroying a lot of good meat and that!

GC Was this the rescue workers? You mean, or.....?

A. No! The ordinary working man, that was in the place! But they had a rescue team at the finish up. There was Wull Cooper, Jim McArthur, Wull Brown, Jock Struth.....that's four that I know of! They were regular men! They were all the regular firemen, there was a trainload of them every day went down, they went in shifts, for to quell this fire, you see!

GC And how long did this fire last? After the accident?

A. Oh, it must have been.....to tell you the truth, I couldn't tell you! They were wanting to seal it in, anyway! They were wanting to close it altogether! But I think that the Union and the Scottish Oils had a bit talk and they eventually decided to keep it open! And it did open again! But at the finish up, it closed in 1956. That's when I left it! And I went into the coal then, and they shut all the coal pits that I was in! I went over to Fife, and I had a go at it there, but it was no good!

GC And did you work in that Scottish Oils coal mine?

A. I worked a wee while in it, yes! I worked about a year and a half of that, in Westmains!

GC But that wasn't with the Scottish Oils?

A. It was under the Coal Board then! I just got you this.....I was trying to get a photo that I had, taken.....in Burngrange, down below, with an ordinary camera, and I can't find that photo now! This young fella took this photo of us, ken, standing at this wee motor! It was quite a good photo too, and there's the kind of wages that we were getting in these days!

GC So, your nett wages were nine pounds and eleven and two pence?

A. Aha!/HP/That was a lot in these days!/And that was me oncost

then! At the same time, and a shilling water money! You should have seen the water up in that Westmains, that's what.....do you know what you got the shilling for? For to keep you supplied with boots! But it was acid water! Your boots.....it was lucky if they lasted three to six months! It burnt them! Burnt the soles of them!/HP/ (inaudible)/Aye, white boots..... they got white boots at the finish up, aye!

GC Was that West Calder?

A. Aye! Is this going yet.....?

GC Aye!

A. HP/The white boots seemingly lasted a while longer!/Aye!

GC White boots?

A. Aye, a white tacketty boot, aye!

GC Were they made of leather?

A. Leather aye! Oh, of the best leather right enough! But still the acid burnt them! It still burnt them! HP/(inaudible)/Aye!

GC And what would these boots cost you?

A. Ten bob! Fifty pence! Well, with me being wee too, in the shale, I had a lot of wee jobs, the likes of when they were.....you know, every think that it was every year, they re-hosed the big cage, you know! And maybe put a new rope on, and I could get inside the big drum, and put on their clamps, you see! Archie Russell always said, 'Come on, Geordie, get in there and get those clamps on!' So I did, that's the kind of wee jobs.....

GC According to your size?

A. Aye!

GC That you were asked to do this? And did you feel.....did you enjoy doing that type of work? Having.....

A. Och, I thought that it was great! Great, aye!

GC Having to go where most of the other workmen couldn't get in?

A. Aye! And then that old Wull, that we were talking about, that's ninety years old, old Jock Armit.every year at Christmas time, you've heard of the sump in the pit, you know, where the shale or coal or whatever it was, went down, we got the job of cleaning it out! You know.....every year and oh.....Archie always paid us well, you know, it was a wet dirty job right enough, but.....Jock and I would always do it! So, in 1956, when he said that the pit was going to close. Jock went into Archie and he says, 'Oh, Archie.....!' And he said, 'What is it, Jock!' He says, 'Do you think that we could clean that sump out for the last time?' Archie looked at him and he said, 'Oh, Jock we'll be filling it in, not cleaning it out!'

GC That would be more like it?

A. Aye!

GC And who were the members.....or who were the officials of the Union? You were a member of the Union?

A. I was a wee while in it! I was a wee while in the Union myself! Well, there was Jim McArthur and Jock Tervitt.....Jock's away now.... away in the East! He went to the coal, you know! And there was Joe Kinsman, he died.....and they were the three main men, and Davie Crombie, in fact..... it's funny.....you were talking there, he's coming home next week! He's been in America for a good number of years, he's coming home for his fiftieth anniversary! Oh aye, there was Jimmy Johnstone, aye, he died too of course!

GC And did you feel that the Union had any strength in the Mines?

A. Oh aye! They reckoned that it was the Union that finished the shale at the finish up! They demanded that much! So, they said right! They called them the Red Union then! They said right, that's it, we're closing it!

GC So you feel that the Company felt that it was uneconomical when they closed?

A. Aye, well, they were going out anyway! Oh they were on the way out... Westwood went. No long after that, Harold? HP/I would say about a couple of years/And then Hermand! It went a wee while too!/ HP/Well, they went five or six years/Did they/HP/ Sixty one, sixty two!/Well, if I had got another four years, I would have got a gold watch, they were giving out gold watches or a silver tea set, you know! And I never even got a pension off them! For all the years that I was in it, not one pension! Did I get! I got three hundred pounds, that was..... they had a scheme.....

GC Provident?

A. Aye, a Provident scheme! And every pound that you earned they put two bob to your credit, you see! Certainly, it was a good thing, because we never.....contributed nothing to it, you see, a lot of people got a.....some people got a thousand pounds out of it, you know! Them that were working with big money, you know!

GC Which would be quite a lot in these days?

A. Aye, it was a lot of money then, aye! That's right! And then we had the three week's work and the week idle, for to give men employment, we brought over the men, from that place in Livingston..... to give them jobs, you know!

GC Was that mines that were closing?

A. They were finished aye, they were all finished! But the likes of Breich

was still going! And Westwood! But they couldn't get into them, so they brought them over here, and we took them into Twenty Six! And Burngrange, we had the Seafield men too, you see! And you had the three week's work and the week idle but that was a good thing, that was in the thirties of course! That was in the early thirties, thirty six or that, thirty seven, thirty eight! But it gave boys employment and I thought that it was a good thing!

GC Yes, and that seems to be the general feeling!

A. Aye, that's right!

GC And did you quite enjoy your week off?

A. We looked forward to it! My fireman came to me one Saturday, I was going away out to enjoy myself, and he said 'You're working next week!' I said, 'No, I'm not!' Because you didn't want it! You were a young man, you wanted to enjoy yourself! But I came home at night, and my mother there.....'Oh, how are you the night?' And I got my cup of milk and a half slice of toast or something, and 'Are you not saying?' 'Saying what?' 'You're working next week!' I had to go to work! She made sure work.....I had to go, and I wasn't going to tell her, you see! He met me at the top of the Church Brae, that was old Jim Black, that was the man.....I could have cursed him.....I could have.... I could have cut his throat!

GC What did you actually do in your spare time then?

A. My spare time?

GC Aye! You had your week off and.....?

A. Well, I liked to go to the dancing, I liked to go to the dancing, and maybe a pint, you know, I was still young enough and old enough, I was about eighteen you see! Let me see, aye..... thirty six! I was eighteen! I liked a bit pint then, you see! Not a half, as I can do now, but.... I used to go to the dancing and me and this wee fella McWhinnie, we used to run about

with a bike, a Vindeck bike.....he would caw it down on the way to the dancing, and I would caw it back the way! Each other taking a seat at the back..... what do you call them.....at the back of your bike.....?

GC A carrier?

A. A carrier! You sit on them! Aye.....oh, many's the good time that we had, aye! But Calder was a great place then, of course! You know what I mean, everybody was in work then, Harold, you know! Harold Purse/You had the Sports! You had the Sports then, of course! And/HP/They came from all over (inaudible)/Aye, a shilling was a shilling then, and you had the two picture houses, you know, and you could take your choice, but, now, oh gee whizz!

GC But where did you actually live, what housing? Was it a Company house that you were in?

A. No, I stayed in the Main Street.....oh, my mother was.....in West Calder..... we stayed in West Calder! Do you know where the Railway Inn is in West Calder?

GC Yes!

A. Well, that's where..... there were houses across there! We stayed there! And there was a police station, and then there was King Street, they built a bit, and then you've got Mungo's..... no, Stewart Street, that's where I stayed then, there! And then you had the Happy Land! A lot of good men came out of there, the Happy Land! Aye! And then you had Mossend and Gavieside! They were all shaleminers too! You see! Or colliers, you know! When the Scottish Oils had it! HP/Oh aye, we had the billiard hall too!

GC Was that run by the Company or not?

A. No, this was privately run.....private run.....a Mr. Boyle run it! You see! And then you had the Poly Hall. You've never been to the Poly Hall?

GC The Polytech?

A. You've heard of it. Many a night we had in it. And then you had the Mason's hall too!

GC Was there dancing there too?

A. What they called the.....we had the 'Doo' dance in there! Oh aye! You had a Tuesday night dancing in the Poly Hall and then you had a Saturday night! See Calders, on a Saturday night! It was choc-a-bloc! You couldn't get into the pub hardly! Sing song (inaudible) too (inaudible) man! (Inaudible).

GC They were mostly shale workers in West Calder, were they?

A. Aye, ninety per cent wasn't it, H? About ninety per cent of them! Very few.....you got the odd one/HP/Mossend, they were shale-miners/Aye, they were all shale!/HP/Addiewell was all shale miners/Aye, there was the Oilworks, that's right! And then they built the Refinery over in Westwood, mind! Aye, so.....aye!

GC And your housing conditions, when you started work? What had you... had you running water inside?

A. Well we had, but see where H stayed.....oh, you wonder how those people lived! Outside toilets! Sitting like wee birds on a spar, (inaudible) sitting down in.....aye, it's true, and there was a man that came up with a cart! And took it all away! How, he sat in yon cart and took it all away along the road, it makes you wonder! There's a wee boy that lives along there yet, he was only a laddie when he came here first, was wee Wullie Dow, and he went in with the empty cart and came away with it.....oh.....the smell! Gee whizz! How people lived in those conditions, you wonder!

GC It would be an ideal job for somebody without a sense of smell?

A. Well, that's true! With a plug on his nose! Oh, you've no idea! They were all good people! Oh aye!

GC The community spirit was there?

A. More so then, than what it is now! If anybody was ill.....or they weren't out at their work, they were enquiring what was wrong! But now, they wouldn't care if you were dead or alive! No!

GC And what did you do if you wanted a bath? For hot water?

A. That's a thing that I can't mind.....I used to give myself a.....

GC Had you a wash house?

A. Aye, an outside washhouse! But I don't know how people that lived in the Happy Land did, but my own house.....we had a wee sink that you could...../HP/They had a tub!/Was it a tub, aye!/HP/ They filled it with water/A wee tub, you see!/HP/And washed yourself.

GC Was it a wooden tub or a zinc.....?

A. HP/It must have been wooden! They were always...../Aye!
And then their fathers coming home from the pit and coming home soaking to the skin, and the big fire on and that was his trousers, took them off, dried them and put them on the next morning! The same.....

GC Did they wear the moleskins?

A. The moleskins, aye! And if I got a hole here, I just stuck the bonnet on it and sewed it up with a pin or something! Oh, gee whizz! Aye!
Now, when I started first in the pit, they had what they called the old ricketty.....you know, it was a boring machine!

GC Hand ratchet?

A. Hand ratchet, that's right! Yon, yon was hard work, you know! Yon

men..... that was hard work! Because they had set.....their tree and get their thingummy in, and they would sit for an hour with that boring the hole, and it had to be perfect! Because if it didn't blow, that was their work all away you see! They had to do all this working!

GC So, it would take approximately an hour to bore a hole.....?

A. Or maybe more aye! A good hour anyway, aye! Aye, it did that!

GC And how many shots were they allowed to fire? The faceman at the time!

A. How many were allowed? Harold.....you'll know better than me./HP/(inaudible)/Aye/HP/(inaudible) Four!

GC You reckon about four?

A. HP/Aye, about four/See, what they had...../HP/But they used to (inaudible)/You had your bottoms then.....what they talked about the bottoms, and then you had your mids.....you know, and then you had your tops, and your braider or whatever they called it! And you weren't allowed to fire them all at once! You had to do your bottoms first, and then the mids and then the tops! You see/HP/We used to light the bottom first, you a couple times, and light and fire again, two or three times, and then/.....you weren't supposed to do/ the only way you would get caught likes of the fireman coming/..... But that's two men that would put you right in the picture, is Tam Crombie over there, he was a fireman, and Jim McArthur was a fireman, and a faceman, they were both fireman and faceman! And they would know more about it than me!/HP/He was in the Rescue Team/He was in the Rescue Team too! McArthur was in the Rescue Team too! So, Tam Crombie stays over there.....just over there.....do you see that old lum thonder, come on and I'll show you!

GCOh, sorry, I went and pulled the plug out there by mistake, so we'll have to go back a wee bit, if you don't mind! And Harold, you're up nearer the tape this time.....what I was discussing while it was off, was strikes! If any of the two of you were involved or affected by

the strikes, maybe not involved directly! Can you say anything about that?

A. Well, the way that was.....we were involved, we're talking about my family, is that we had next to nothing, we didn't get any strike pay or nothing!

GC Which strike was this?

A. The 1926! As a boy of ten, I.....I remember it! And I remember my mother saying to me 'Here Geordie, there's the last two bob in the house', and she says 'Away round to that shop, Mrs. Milnes, and get half a half loaf, and a penny packet of tea, and we'll have a wee cup of tea, and if there's a wee scart of jam left, we'll have it, so that was it, and we used to.....'

END OF TAPE

GJ/HP SIDE TWO

A. So we sat round the fire and had this wee cup of tea, and we were all huddled up, you know, and after we had this cup of tea, my mother said, 'Right, get the old pram out, and we'll have to go up the road now, and get some more wood, to keep the fire going!' Because there was no such thing, we couldn't buy coal! There was no dole money! No strike pay! You had to live on your wits then! Oh aye, there was the soup kitchens. (Wife talking) Round at Flannigans in the old stable! Aye! There you are, that's right!

GC That was Kate saying that?

A. Aye! That's right! So, we used to go up the road as I said, and get this wood and come back down, and then we would wonder what the hell we would do next! There was such a thing as 'crows' at that time, too, you could go into this place and you could get a wee bit bag of coal, if you were lucky, you see!

GC Where was that?

A. That was up at West Mains, where this mine was, that we were talking about! We used to go up with an old bike, a ladies' bike especially, because you could put a wee bag on, and you could jump on the bike, with your wee bag of coal and come down the braes, right into Calder!

GC And had you to pay for this coal?

A. No! No! You were taking a chance going in, picking it you see! So..... that's how we kept ourselves warm, you know, and then.....oh, I don't know after that!

GC Was there any trouble during the strikes? Can we ask H about...
he can remember, he probably wasn't there, but maybe he could remember about a bit of trouble in West Calder during the strike, or after the strike, was it?

A. HP/No, it was during the strike, when seemingly..... the man Davidson.....his wife was pregnant and he was demanding money of this Duncan Hay, but of course, not just him, there was.....I suppose there would be hundreds there, and they sent for the specials into Edinburgh, and there was a trainload came out, and got off the train, came into Calder, lined up and marched up belting them with batons and everything, to disperse the crowd. And that that's hearsay!/That's true what H is saying, Mr. Davidson, he was demanding money off this Duncan Hay, he was the dole man, you see, and there was no sign of it, so he made a rush, and this is when Mr. Davidson was battered, right, left and centre. With batons! And at that.....after that I don't know what happened, because I got off my mark, up the street, and into this farm, at this wee dairy that I knew, I hid myself up there, I didn't want to see any more, so I don't know what happened after that! But I know that they came out from Edinburgh, the special police!

GC And you were actually there when it happened?

A. I was actually there when it happened! Aye!/HP/And then there was the men from the Woolfords, and the Worrirts, they came down and took over the jobs! When the men were on strike! And.....I think

that they were a bit peeved at that, you know, the West Calder men!

GC Would you say that they were blackleggers?

A. HP/Oh aye, they were blacklegging. And after the strike, when the men went back to do their job, well, they were shifted out of their own places and were put into places that they knew they could not make money in! They were giving what they cried the 'berries' as what they cried it then, to them that were blackleggers. So a lot of the men were complaining and they were sacked! The men that were sacked were blacklisted, in this area, not just West Calder, but where the Scottish Oils had any dealings at all! They were blacklisted to get a job with any firm at all! As you know, there was.....I know that I can mention six, I think, but there would be a lot more than that too! But the six I can mind of, was my father, there was Wullie Collins, 'Usher' Hamilton, 'Corny' Tonner, Douglas.....what was his other name? Well, anyway that's five, they got.....I mind of them... my father saying that he had got started on the building site, they were building something. Was it this bridge along here? And they got started, they weren't on the job half an hour, and the guy came back and he says he was sorry, that he shouldn't have started anybody! But they knew what the score was!

GC So really, the Scottish Oils affected other private firms in the area?

A. HP/They stopped firms, and they dictated their terms!

GC So, they not only dictated to their workers, but they were dictating to.....other builders.....

A. HP/Other industries, to them.....I think..... the builders and that, I think that they had the monopoly! They must have had... the monopoly for to tell the.....and they let them in to do a job, or whatever, they must have had the monopoly to start men, or tell them to.....you're not to start them, they blacklisted.

- GC And there was no doubt about that, that that was the reason.....but that wasn't the reason that they were given!
- A. HP/Oh no! That was true! They had to go to Fort William, they had to go up to the tunnels for to get work, for to get money for to keep the family!
- GC So, they had to leave the area altogether? Away from any influence from the Scottish Oils?
- A. HP/Yes, that's what happened! Isn't that right, George?/The influence that they had in this area from Seafield, Blackburn, Livingston, Pumpherston, they had all that area! And they could dictate the terms! And the Worrits, Tarbrax and all them, they were that strong that they wouldn't even let public houses into their place, for the men to have a wee bit enjoyment after they did their work! I had to go away to... come to West Calder here and go to Blackburn there.....maybe for a bit pint you see! You couldn't even get recreation..... they had halls right enough, but there was no drink! You could get a wee dance and things like that.....but that's about all that you could get! Aye! There was no drink!/HP/In Tarbrax, there was a store up there!/ Aye, there was a store./HP/That they brought the beer into, aye! What was the name of it?/I don't know the name of it! But Johnny Millar took the.....didn't the.....Johnny Millar, old Johnny Millar, he had a grocer's shop in West Calder, and he had a van, I don't know what the motor would be, but he had a wee Ford/(Wife talking) It was a horse!/It was a horse and cart/(Wife talking) He used to go away to Tarbrax at the weekend!/(Wife talking) Wee 'Rab' used to go and get a packet of sweeties at night for his day's work.
- GC Is that why you got it, Kate?
- A. That's her brother that she is talking about!
- GC Oh yes?

A. And my father used to go up with another lorry, and he supplied the drink, Neilsons, I don't know whether you have heard of it, he had a place at the top of West Calder, and he went in.....(Wife talking) Neilson's Factory! He took in the bottles of beer and the whisky, and the lemonade and things like that, into the boys and made sure that they got their drink at the weekend, to save them coming down to West Calder./HP/They did not like coming down to West Calder because they were shunned! The people in West Calder just wouldn't entertain them! The Woolfords or Tarbrax, but then.....in my time, there was no animosity, no, no. I heard my father and that sayingthere was not one of them that would come down, and when they did come down, the people just shunned them, they wouldn't talk to them! They ignored them altogether!/At the finish up, quite a few of them, there was one man that H mentioned here, one of the 'leading lights', he went to the United Colliery, and he became the delegate and everything.....he was a great Communist.....but he was a great fighter, and that was 'Corny' Tonner! And he was a well liked man about this area, and he fought for all the working people that he could fight for! And that's where he.....

GC He was a strong Union man?

A. He was a strong Unionist man, and he was one that was barred.....but he went to the United Collieries and he got a job there and he eventually rose up, and it finished up, he was a delegate with the National Coal Board when it was nationalised too, you see, he was a leading light round about here!

GC Now can I ask H here, when did you start with the Scottish Oils?

A. HP/Oh, it was about nineteen fifty!

GC And where did you start?

A. Burngrange Pit!

GC And what age were you then?

A. Well, coming up on sixteen!

GC So, you had just left the school?

A. Well, not long after it anyway!

GC And why did you start in Burngrange? Was there nothing else that you could do?

A. Well, it was either staying on at school, which I didn't.....(Mrs. Jordan talking.....) You left the school at fourteen/I left at fifteen, Kate! It was changed by that, and I had to go to fifteen years old, and it was either staying on at school, and going into Edinburgh, for little money, or a job in the pit. Well, at that time, my father he was idle, and the boys, they were just back from the war and that, and och well.....I felt that it was my duty to go and get a job and

GC To earn some money?

A. To earn some money for my mother! I had been on the milk round from when I was eleven years old, and what I earned went.....my mother got it, you know, from when I was eleven, and well in those days, you didn't pay digs, well, I.....know that I didn't, I just walked in and I got my pocket money! Which, after a couple of years or three years, I said 'Och, I'm wanting to go on digs, Ma!' And at that time I was getting three pound odds a week, and I had to give my mother two pounds fifty for my digs, and I was left with ten shillings! I was better off handing over my pay packet, than what I was going on to digs! I had to buy all my clothes and that, off the.....you know, the money that was left! I was doing the overtime when I got a chance and the overtime.....for to get your money! But that money had to go for paying your clothes! For anything that you wanted, you had to pay for!

GC And what kind of work did you do in Burngrange?

A. Well, I started on the oncost, and on the benching.....well, I started

on the pit bottom first as a.....you always got a training.....you know, a week or two weeks kind of training on the pit bottom, then you graduated from there and you got put on the bottom of the dooks/George Jordan/The docks, aye!/Which was just to bring you on.....to give you the experience and after that you either went on as a chain runner or you went on to other jobs, you know,...../GJ/Diesel drivers/Aye, diesel drivers and.....but you always got a step up more or less, getting more experience that you got, you went further on. I'm saying further on, but you got harder jobs.....

GC And more money?

A. No, oh no!

GC The same money?

A. The same money! And unless you went on to the drawing.....well, I went on to the drawing in 1955, and I'll tell you, it was hard work! It was ridiculous what you were getting paid for the work that you were putting out. I know I went on.....and at that time I was making seven pounds odds on the oncost, that was five years, you know, after I had started, and I was getting seven pounds fifty, I think it was..... seven pounds ten shillings, or twelve shillings, whichever!

GC Old money?

A. In old money, and I went on to the drawing.....knocking your pan in and coming home with nine pounds! Meaning that it wasn't worth your while, if you hadn't a faceman that was well in the know, because there was favouritism in all the pits, and there were certain men in the pit were paid.....for very little, they were doing! Is that true or false, G/GJ/And as you say, there were certain men got the right places! And I'll tell you...../Got the pick of their places/ GJ/There colliers came to.....Burngrange.....up there.... and they weren't there a week, and they said 'How do you work this kind

of thing, how do you do this kind of work?' 'I couldn't do this.'

GC And what was the difference then?

A. GJ/Well, the difference was, they were on fans or belts, and they were on their knees all day.....the kneepads on, you see! And all they were doing was shovelling the coal, and they said you'll rack yourself to death, they said, you go down cuddies here, you're throwing them on the plates and you're going round, and you're snibbling up. 'I couldn't do that work', he says, 'That's not my type of work', he says,/HP/Shoving a hutch in itself was.....it was hand filling, they sort of cried it, and in the coal.....of course. West Mains was hand filling/GJ/But it was an old fashioned pit, you know...../But the modern ones they were all belts, but.....I don't know about West Mains, as far as drawing was concerned/GJ/ Oh.....the drawing was...../Like wee'er hutches/GJ/Wee'er hutches, nine hundredweight, just! And see the shale hutches, they were twenty four, twenty five hundredweight/That was our ones, and then you went to Westwood and they held over the ton. They were bigger hutches. A box hutch held over a ton./GJ/That's right!/ To give us over the ton, we had to set them up, what we cried them setters, it was big bits so as to build the hutch, but they actually made it look bigger, you know, that gave you your.....

GC That took it over the ton?

A. Aye, but you had to do that, because it was the time involved, the time say, that you boxed a hutch, without putting a setter on it, the time that you boxed it and went out and came back in, well, that was time wasted, if you put the setters on, it was actually giving you another half hutch! With a setter round it! So that was saving you running back and forward, if the hutch was.....it was.....murder, going out and in with the hutches! And if you were in a bad road, your legs ohwhen it came to lousing time, your legs were shaking, they were like jelly! And then with the coal, as I say, was lighter work, but

different type. You weren't used to it, the low workings.....

GC Now, you were a coal miner, but at first, you were a shale miner, and then went to the coal, and which did you prefer?

A. Oh, the shale! Although it was harder work, it was cleaner, you had better air,/GJ/Healthwise it was the best! The shale was the best! Your wages were poorer in the shale too, but I like the men better in the shale whether it was because I started in the shale, I don't know, but I liked the men better, in the shale! I always got on better with the men in the shale than what I did with the men in the coal!

GC And which colliery did you go to?

A. I went to Sanquhar, Gateside Colliery! And I only stayed there one month, and I was back, and I went over to Fife, to Blair.....Blairhall over at.....Valleyfield.....

GC And that was another mine?

A. No, that was a pit!

GC A coal pit?

A. Aye, a coal pit! Gateside was a coal pit, and it was an old fashioned as.....it was opened in 1889 or something, and see when you went down in the cage, it was like.....not like the rope cage, that we went down in the.....in Burngrange, it was yon slides, and it rattled.....only four men allowed in the cage going down, and when.....you landed on the bottom on this, you got off and it was just like a big cavern... and you could see where it was hewn with hand picking, it must have been when you could see the mark of the pick all the way round, just hand hewn! And I thought that that was bad enough, you know, compared with the shale, you went into the pit bottom, and it was all lighted but at Gateside there were the wee lights right enough, but it was only

wee lights, it was nothing like the shale! Then you went on to a hurling rake, two on a hutch, and you had to lie on the hutch and you daren't move, you couldn't put your head up because you were rubbing on the roof, all the way in and you had over a mile.....to travel on that, and you got off the travelling rake and then you went.....about thirty or forty yards to it, what they cried the fireman's point, and he detailed you to your work, and what type of work you were going to be doing! Well, he put me on to girders, he put Frank on to.....this Frank Ashfieldthe two of us went on to it together, no, he put Frank on to.... it was couplings, but it was thon...../GJ/Clipping?/Clipping aye! He put him on to the clipping and he put me on to the girders. Well, Frank, he had never saw a clip in his life and we were all used with the couplings, well, the table, we made a table where there was all couplings, you know, couplings that you used between the hutches, and it was the gavy that you put on the front ones, whereas they had a chain, and...../GJ/It was a big.....you put it on to the rope and you...../Clipped it down on to the rope/GJ/ Clipped it down on to the rope!

GC On to the grab?

A. GJ/Aye!/Aye! The hutch ken...../GJ/left on it's own, you see, but they had to have men at certain points watching thefor off the roads and that.....ken/Well, they put Frank on to that, and the first day, well, I thought that.....I felt that it was torture, going into this three feet, and men six foot odds were walking in no bother, and me, five foot four, I hit, I think, every girder that was going! I walked in that blinking road, and I landed on my backside umpteen times.....oh, yon was.....!

GC Now, you mentioned, Harold, that miners coming from the coal mines into the shale, they didn't like that now, how could you explain that, or can you.....?

A. It was heavier work, and the type of work, it was different, as I'm saying.....

GC Yet they had more air, more roof space, more everything.....cleaner?

A. Cleaner! You see, you hadn't the money either..... the money..... the

money difference there too.....we were well below what the coal miners got..... They were coming out with twenty pounds and that, and we would be coming home with our nine or ten! GJ/See, what I was going to say, see H's talking, you're talking about the differencenow H on the drawing would maybe put out fifteen tons of shale, you see, and the collier would put out fifteen tons of coal, what they called stripping, stripping you see! H would be sorer than that man was.....because with wrestling of the hutches and snibbling them, and maybe putting them down this cuddie, where this man would be sitting on his knees all the time, picking away and he would have his fifteen ton away, before H had his ten or seven tons, and he would be wrought to death! And that's the way that those boys had said 'Oh, we couldn't do that!' They got out.....well, for less money, you see! You were doing more for less money/Aye! They didn't like it at all! But.....I think that it was all.....it all depends where you start when you leave the school.....if you had startedken, in.....if I had started in the coal, I daresay, coming backken, going into the shale, I would never had liked it! The same, vice versa, if I'd started in the shale, and went to the coal and everything.

GC You wouldn't have liked that?

A. No! I think that there was more.....more 'patter' too/GJ/
And I'll tell you another thing, in the shale..... the men although they got upset with things, there was always that wee bit of scuffle and that, you know, but they got uptight, like you weren't getting on, and maybe somebody coming in, likes of the roadsmen, they were coming in to maybe do something, they would say, oh, let me get this hutch filled, and you know, the roadsmen they were in a hurry, they were wanting to get their jobs done, and you'd say, oh,one.....and it would just 'boil' up.....over nothing, and/GJ/Then another thing, in fact you were better getting lined up and getting the work done, the fireman has/GJ/as H says, was okay, you got on with it, but you had your wee battles, but you still got that.....and I'll tell you another thing, you were more or less guaranteed your day's work, with the Scottish Oils! But with the coal, you never knew when

you were maybe going to go on strike, but there were very very little strikes, I don't think..... there was only one that I know of.....up in Burngrange.....all the time that I was in it, and I was in it from '41 to '56, and I was in Twenty Six from the 1930's to '41! And I bet you I can only remember one strike, in the shalefields, when I was at those two pits. All the time that I was there!

GC Can you remember what that strike was about?

A. GJ/Yes, it was about oncost laddies, I don't.....was it oncost laddies..... they were wanting a rise, and they..... the rotten thing about that strike was.....the fathers of those laddies went and did their jobs!/And I was pit bottomer at the time, and it wasn't involving me at all, I said right, I was in the Union at the time, and I said, I'm out too, with those laddies, and I said, those men, it's a damned disgrace! Aye, but, at the finish up, one of the fathers said they were quite right, he says, for my laddie to go down the pit, I wouldn't say anything about that job again, he says. He was murdered doing the job, you see/(inaudible) GJ/That was Jimmy White/Aye!

GC And how long did that strike last?

A. GJ/Well, it was only about a week, if it did last a week! It didn't last much longer/Oh, but they got their money though/George Jordan/They got their money!

GC They won their case?

A. GJ/They won their case!

GC And did the Union help them to win it?

A. GJ/The Union helped them to win it! With me coming out, helped them too, I think! Because I wasn't actually doing the work, they were doing, but I was putting the hutches up the pit, and I said, well, if this is going to stop, I stopped, I don't know whether some -

body got my job or not, Harold, I can't mind, but I refused to do the job, anyway, I refused to do it!/Your roadsman too, down the shale, when you compare the two, well, the only places that you had wheels, or wheels down, was on your wood roads, and the/GJ/In the coal, aye!

GC What did you call these?

A. Wood roads!

GC Wood roads? What were these?

A. They were the side shoots! The top side and the bottom side of the main roads and what they cried the strapping area, at the top side where the belts, you put.....the wood had to go on there, and go down on the belts, ken, for the men, and they took the wood off when it was needed, so as to shore up as they were stripping, these roads were atrocious, I mean, if this had been in the shale these roads would have been maintained, but they would have been kept.....it would have been no bother going in, with a bogey!/GJ/They wouldn't have done it, those lads in the shale!/Oh no!/GJ/They wouldn't have done it! The conditions that were in the coal!

GC Now, safety-wise, between shale mining and coal mining, was there a difference as far as the Companies were concerned, were they more strict? In one or the other, or was it just about equal?

A. Well.....you see, the chances that we took in the shale.....I think that the chances that we took George/GJ/I ken! I think that it depended on yourself, but the Companies laid the law down, you know, about safety, but I think that in the long run, I think that/The coal was actually the same, because you took your chances as well, you weren't supposed to jump on to a belt, going out the road/GJ/That's right!/All the belt was, it was dangerous but..... they all done it. You saw a lot of the older ones, as they say, when in Rome do as the Romans do! If you're caught, then you got a wagging, and you got told

if you were caught again, you would likely get the sack! And you took that chance. In the shale, I was never ever picked up, I always jumped a stoop before the pit bottom, you know hurling on the full rakes - you rakes, hutch rakes was terrible. Used to come up past No. 10 and you stood with your leg astride with the drop between you. Now if that rope had a bump and the hutch had went off the road on that rake, the rope hit the slipper and went up 2 feet, if that had happened and you were standing like that it would have castrated you. If the rope had hit the hutch too, it would have whip-lashed you. But you stood there and as the hutches came up they travelling at quite a speed you timed your jump so as to land on the buffer of the first hutch. That was them, that was you, you know. One stood there, and say there was two or three of us at the side, well you had to jump up between the full hutches and land on the buffers. If you missed, you went under the rake. But we all done it. Davie Hutchison, one day, I jump on the cabbie hutch, Davie say I'll get on the side. He jumped and he missed. Well I had to jump back off, because I knew there was something, you know. He was lucky, only taken the heel off his boot. His heel got caught with the full hutch and his boot must have been loose that wee bit, and his heel got taken clean off, lucky he wasn't killed. If he hadn't, if his foot.....had been taken, he would have lost a foot or something or he would have been taken under the wheels of the hutch following up. That's the things that you did, that you shouldn't have been doing. Same. Maybe we shouldn't be saying this you see - och, it doesn't matter. These things happened and they knew that it happened. The facemen too, firing shots that were illegal, but they took a chance. Of course, in saying that they took a chance the men knew, they knew what they were doing. That's all them who did it. These men weren't daft. They weren't stupid - I mean, it was unfortunate about the disaster, that was just, a thing, a thing that happened. I don't know what happened, but it was just misfortune. At that time it was, they were going about with naked lights, but we weren't. We were going about with, when I started, all your oncost, everything, there was no naked lights or anything and you know at the face, the oncost or anything, you had your battery lamps.

GC How long did you work in the shale?

A. Well, four years. In Hermand, when I came back from Fife.

GC So you were in the shale, left and came back to the shale?

A. Aye! That was 1956, I was up there a month, over there in Fife for over a year, 1957, you can say '58, and I was at Hermand until it closed, when I came back, I came back in '58.

GC So, in total, how many years did you do in Scottish Oils?

A. I can't mind when Hermand shut. Was it '63, '60? och you can say 10, about 10 years. Say '62 it shut.

GC But none of you have regretted working in the shale mines?

A. Oh, no! I would go back in the morning/Tomorrow/I'd go back to the shale tomorrow if I was young.....

GC You would?

A. I would go back to the shale tomorrow if I was young. I would go back to the shale tomorrow, for it was good clean work.

GC But how many other young fellows today would go down the mine?

A. I think they'll be a lot. Like the conditions of the place.....

END OF TAPE

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