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HB

Q. What mine was it you worked in?

A. No. 6 mine the Roman Camp.

Q. When did you start there?

A. I started for a fortnight then I was called up to the Air Force. I came back in 1942. January or February 1942.

Q. How old were you then?

A. 20.

Q. Did you start with your father or brothers?

A. No, I was the first miner in my family.

Q. What made you go into it then?

A. I was brought back from the Air Force, exempted from the Air Force and I had no father and I was one of a large family and they were all, young and my mother needed me at home.

Q. Was there no other work for you in Broxburn?

A. We had Oil Works, see I was shifted from the Oil Works to the mine, I did not want to be a miner but they persuaded me. It (the works and mines) all belonged to one firm, Scottish Oils and he wanted (the mine manager) for me to go down the mine, I said I would give it a try. I was only a fortnight there when I got called but I was glad to get back, I had no time for the Forces.

Q. What were you doing in the mine?

A. I started in the drawing, filling hutches for four years and I was a spare drawer come faceman. If the drawer was off I was sent in to do his job or the faceman's job if he was off. I did about 6 months of that and then I got put on to a place of my own. I had my own place at 24 years of age. I was there from 1942 – 5, that is when it closed. Down and I went from there to Westwood.

Q. Were you at Westwood until it shut?

A. No, I stuck four months and I packed it in and went away to the coal in Fife, at Glenrothes and worked until it closed, so in all 15 years.

Q. What were the big differences between the shale and coal?

A. On average shale mining was harder but cleaner, the conditions were better. The coal pit some jobs were very hard but other jobs it was the conditions that made it hard.

Q. Was the shale a skilled job?

A. No, cleaner, just the same amount of skill in fact there was more skill in coal, more machinery but cleaner. I could come up the shale mine the way I am just now. There is some men you thought never worked down a mine, other people sweated they could? You work down a coal pit and you are black and that is the difference and conditions plus the fact the coal. I have worked in seams 3 ft high and about 1½ ft. of water, not all the time.

Q. You would not have anything like that in the shale.

A. Not in the mines I worked in, there was some water in the shale but not to that extent. The water in Camps mine they could pump it out within an hour, every 24 hrs they would start this pump.

Q. So you would not be working in water in the shale?

A. No, I never got wet in the shale mine but the coal's different.

Q. When you started it would be an electric borer.

A. Yes, there was no hand machines but it was all hand machines previous to that. I only saw the hand borer being used once, an old miner boring a wee man hole when there was no electricity, I had heard of them but it was all electric borers that I used.

Q. Once you got down to the pit bottom how far was it from there that you used to work?

A. ½ a mile, we just walked that.

Q. Was it a dangerous job in the shale?

A. That was a dangerous mine that I worked in, it had a bad roof, you had to have plenty supports up. Other shale mines the roofs would be standing and nothing to hold them. The likes of the Dunnet in Westwood, the Dunnet 6, 6 that's the name of a section in the Dunnet, it was amazing how that roof held up and then you got the same over here at Winchburgh. I finished up there when I came back from the coal, at Winchburgh. I was only five months back when they completely shut down

an over there you have seen trees standing and you go and knock them down with your hand, they are rotten, and yet the roof's still there. You had what you call a crown, a tree across and a center leg on it every two feet and after a while you had to go back and maybe put in others in between them. The danger in the shale mining was what they called stooping that is you coming, back and taking all the shale round about you, you were retreating and then then the leg comes down and crashes. I have seen a big pillar and you hear it creaking and cracking so you get out and the roof all closer down round about it. You get that warning, but at the same time I was 15 years in that mine and I went up to Westwood and was only there two or three weeks, but I will never forget it was the Saturday morning I went out it was creaking and I would not go into it. There was an old miner there who worked, as a roadsman he said, "It's alright son, but I just could not believe him after what I had seen in the Camps but definitely it was alright but I took an hour before I went into it, I was very apprehensive. It was just a layer of shale easing, so I pinched it all down before I'd go down and I kept pinching it in, so oh' to me that was mining at its best compared to the Camps that was about one of the worst mines there was.

Q. Did miners do different mines, did they talk about each one, some had a bad name and some a good name.

A. That is right. There was 35 pit at Threemiletown at Linlithgow they say that was quite a hard pit, Totlewells, but all and all Camps was just as bad as any No. 6.

Q. Was there some that were harder to get the shale out of than others.

A. Yes, well I could get more shale from Westwood than I could from Camps, because it was a smaller seam, on average if you could get 24 hutches of shale a day that is between you and two drawers, that was a good days work. I could produce more than that up at Westwood because it is a bigger seam and less timbering to do, this was what took up the time, they called it a wooden mine, there was more timber went down than shale came up, near enough, I am exaggerating a bit but that is true.

Q. Was there a lot of men that tried to move about between mines, trying to get work at the good ones.

Q. What kind of clothes were you wearing.

A. Moleskins and a blue vest.

Q. Did you have any sort of jacket that you took with you or was it too hot

A. My jacket came down with me, jacket and jersey and scarf to get to my work, then

off came the jersey, shirt, you have your moleskins and helmet, it was a carbide lamp to start with and then your battery came in 1946 they introduced the battery to that mine and made it a safety mine.

Q. What about boots?

A. Tackety boots.

Q. Would you take a piece down with you.

A. Yes, I used to have jam and cheese or sometimes meat sandwiches, but I preferred a salad piece in the summer, lettuce, something moist, it wasn't always jam, cheese and meat. I had a tin flask with cold tea in it and it was a lovely drink if you were dry, of course there was sugar in it.

Q. What kind of thing did you do when you were finished work, was there an Institute up at the Camps.

A. I lived in a wee village, so there was nothing there. The houses are still there, just out to the corner, we had a wee tossing school then or maybe play cards. We had an air-raid shelter during the war, steam, pipes and everything in it, that used to be our gambling den after the war.

Q. What kind of card games did you play, was it brag.

A. Usually pontoon, but I was never, I did not like playing it I thought it was a "dirty" game. Don't know the right value some people go a shilling on a pair of deuces for you to go 2d, but to me that was not right. That was all there was there except you could go a walk through the woods. In fact I enjoyed life better up there than I do now I did not drink when I lived up there.

Q. There would be nowhere to drink up there.

A. There was a halfway house at Broxburn, you used to be able to go up through the fields but the motorway stops you from doing that now. Ten minutes would take you from Camps to the halfway house.

Q. Was there football teams in the villages?

A. You are going back too far, that died out when I was a kid, I cannot mind but I have heard the men on the corner talk about them. No, there was nothing just the corner, out to the corner, good time though. You had two or three wee plots some nights, you worked and other nights you just blethered.

Q. Was it when the Roman Camps closed that you went to the coal.

A. No, I went to Westwood for four months and then I went to Fife in 1956. I was there six years and I left six months before it shut, I saw it coming, I wanted out.

A. I can assure you that up there now some people from Edinburgh have got houses, it is people that are retired, to get away from the rat race. It is a shanty town now, there are only two original people up there now, two sisters and Alec Hunter, he was the under manager in the Oil Works up there.

Q. What deductions did you have off your pay and how much were you payed, how much did you make as a faceman having your own place?

A. It all depended on what you produced, you were paid in tonnage. When I started I think it was 14/6d a day for a drawer that was just a flat shift.

Q. That was just a flat rate.

A. Yes, that is right you could maybe make 3/- a day more. You see I worked with a contractor so it was up to him. He maybe give me (just for a figure) say £2 a shift, it would be worth for him about £2.5/- a shift, which was the luck of the draw, this is what happened, it all depends on individual?

Q. So, was the contractor thing still in operation when you were there.

A. No, they broke them up, then came a faceman and two drawers. The contractor he had four facemen and all our equipment. See I have got you and another laddie working with me but the three of us are working for Jock Brown up home and he could be in the Royal Infirmary and still get money off us, more money than any of us.

Q. Were you paying rent to Scottish Oils.

A. Yes, I think it was 5/2d a week. At one time you used to get cheap electricity up here as well but people beat themselves. We were getting the electricity from the oil works and payed 7d a week and then they started putting in electric cookers and things, that was taboo, we were using too much power or something because the Electricity Board moved in, somebody moved in and we had to pay for what you burned .

Q. What about the Doctor?

A. Well, years ago you paid for the Doctor then ,2/6d came off your pay.

Q. You said you came back to Winchburgh until it shut down, did you have any trouble getting another job after that.

A. I got a job in a clay pit for one week, that was enough.

Q. What was that like?

A. I was only doing it three days, the manager had shale mining experience, he got his training in the shale mines. So he came down this day with his under manger an ex. policeman, so he said to me "how are you going about repairing this"and I started saying "I'll do this and I will do that" So the policeman said what did you do that for, so I said to myself what are we getting here. I turned round and said to the manager, Bob you have asked the wrong man, there is your man he'll repair it for you, he knows better than me, get my wage ready for Friday. I said "that is enough for me, I want out" so I did, the conditions were terrible, dampness, everything was damp, you could not even sit down. That is one thing the shale mine it was clean, my place in the shale mine was as clean as this ? there was a wee drop stoor, it is cleaner than your main road.

Q. What about when you are blasting did you not get a lot of fumes and that.

A. Your air-course took it away from you, although sometimes we had bad air, for reek came of the powder that was used, sometimes you had to get a fan in. I remember one day I was in working, I was in the drawing, I said "it is awfully thick, follow the wind for a mile I am getting poisoned, I better hurry up and get this hutch filled and get cut, I did not know the fan up so I got the hutch filled, it went out and was waiting on this other fellow coming in with an empty so that I could get out, you know I had to wait on him shunting for me, well I was standing there, the legs ran out on me, there was no air in the place what a state I was in, if I stayed there any longer I would not be talking to you now.

Q. So, were you able to go back to work that day, was it just a temporary thing.

A. Yes, I wanted to go out of the mine but the contractor said no just sit there you'll be alright, but it was quite an experience.

Q. Was there much trouble with gas?

A. No, I remember just after I got a place I was put on to drive a road through old workings and I tell you it was dangerous, a new experience and I was petrified, but I didn't take any chances because I was getting paid a wage. Whenever I was not sure of anything I would go out and see the contractor I used to work with (?) He was off the face he was on the roads, a roadsman, I used to get him to come in just

to see what he would say, I eventually drove this road to a certain point I broke through into this other section and the under manager came in and said that is the best thing you have done, that means this mine is not safe now(?) it was full of black damp, this area I went into (?) but the rule (?) that I worked, let the air get in there.

Q. And generally there was not much gas in the places.

A. No, sometime.

LIVINGSTON OIL MUSEUM

Mr H B (Broxburn) - Summary of transcript prepared by J Davidson, Museum Assistant,
April 1988

Industrial

Information:

Roman Camps,

I started in No 6 mine, Roman Camps in 1942.

Broxburn:

I was then 20 years old.

1942 – 1955

I started in the drawing, filling hutches for four years. I was spare drawer, also spare faceman. If the drawer was absent, I was sent to do his job, and that of the faceman if he was off. I did about 6 months of that, then I got a place of my own at 24 years of age. I was there from 1942 to 1955 when it closed.

Westwood:

I transferred to Westwood where I worked for four months, then I went to work in the coal mines.

1955

Mr B was at Westwood for a period of some four months only.

When I started, it was on electric borer. The mine I worked in was dangerous, it had a bad roof, however, there were plenty of supports.

Danger in the shale mining was during stooping, that is, you're coming back and taking all the shale out, you were retreating and then the leg comes down and the roof area crashed. I have seen a pillar creaking and cracking, so you get out and the roof closes down about it.

There were some mines harder than others to get the shale out. I could get shale out of Westwood much easier than I could out of the Camps because it was smaller seams. On average, if you could get 24 hutches of shale a day, that is between you and two drawers, that was a good days work. I could have produced more than that at Westwood.

Because it was a bigger seam and required less timber. This is what took up the time. They called it a wooden mine (Roman Camps), because there was more timber going down than shale coming up, near enough.

Wages:

If you stayed in Broxburn, your worked in Broxburn, and very few moved about. You were paid on what you produced, by the tonnage. When I started, I think it was 14/6 a day for a drawer. That was just one shift. I could maybe make £2 a shift, while the faceman would receive something like £2 – 5/- per day. It was just the luck of the draw.

Gas Trouble:

When blasting took place, we sometimes got bad air from the reek of the powder that was used, and sometimes we had to get a fan in.

Domestic

Life:

I lived in a small village so there was nothing there. The houses are still there. Just out to the corner we had a wee tossing school where we would maybe play cards.

We had an air-raid shelter during the war with steam pipes and everything we needed. That used to be our gambling den after the war.

When I was at Scottish Oils we used to pay 5/2 a week. At one time, we used to get cheap electricity from the oil works – 7d a week, and then they started putting in electric boilers and things so, that was taboo. We were using too much power or something because the Electricity Board moved in and you had to pay for what you used.

Health:

Years ago you paid for a doctor. It was taken off your wages at the rate of 2/6. (this would appear to be a mistake. This payment was normally 6d per week from one working member of the family.)

Leisure

Activities:

We used to play cards in our gambling den. That was all there was except to go for a walk through the woods. There was a Halfway house at Broxburn. You used to be able to go up through the fields. Ten minutes would take you from Camps to the Halfway house.

There was no football team as far as I can remember. I have heard the men on the corner talking about it but, it died out when I was a kid.

Gardening and

Socialising at

Roman Camps:

You had two or three plots and some nights you worked and some nights you just blethered.