

JD

JD Well, I started in Thirty Five Pit in October, 1926. I had been....I should have left the school actually at Easter, in April, but I didn't have a job so I stayed on at the school till the summer holidays were past. So I got a job in Thirty Five Pit and I started there on the pit bottom in October 1926.

GC What age were you then?

JD I was fourteen and a half then, because my birthday was in the February, you see. So the first day that I went down the pit.....and the fireman's box was on the pit bottom just a wee bit away from the shaft, and I just went down there with one of the roadsmen, and he took me to the fireman's box, and I was there, and here a rake came down from the back of the bottom, and it ran into the sump. The pony driver had missed his snibbles! Leckie Bell was the pony driver! He lived in the rows at the pit there in the Red Row, and he was the pony driver, and he had burst the snibbles, and the rake ran away from him, and this was what happened..... that one of the hutches went into the sump, so that was an accident right away, you could say!

GC Who was the Manager at the time?

JD At that time the Manager was Jock Sneddon, and Jimmy Beattie was the head roadman. That's who I was trying to mind.....Jimmy Beattie was the head roadman, and Jock Sneddon was the under-manager. Mr. Wilson, he lived in Uphall, at "Elmbank", the big house up.....

GC Who was Mr. Wilson?

JD He was the Manager! Mr. Peter Wilson was his name. An awful kind of dour man, he never said very much. However, I was there, I was on the pit

bottom there, for about a couple of years. Whenever I was sixteen, I got shifted off the pit bottom, into the roller section. This was the first bench.

GC What were you doing at the pit bottom before you went on to.....

JD I was taking the "tow jiggers". When the hutches were coming in off the endless haulage, I was taking the tow off the jiggers, taking the jiggers out of the full ones, and putting them on the empties, and then sending the empties away. On the underground haulage, it was an endless haulage and the rope went right up the shank, and the engine house for the endless haulage was up above, and the shank was fifty four fathoms deep! So you'll know, it was some size of a rope, because it went away, away in the haulage and away down, and up hills and down braes! Right away to the end of the haulage, which was quite a long bit away! Anyway, I was on the rollers for a while, and then I got shifted. I was on two or three different jobs. I was on a brake up the back of...the bottom and I was on the foot of the big brake, at the hillend, what they called the hillend section of the big brae, there were seven hutches. It was a self-acting incline, there were seven full ones came down and they pulled seven empty ones up the other side. The double road, you see, and when they pushed the seven hutches, they were all coupled up, and they put the gabble, that was the coupling on the end of the tow, that's what you called the gabbie. But they put the gabbie on the last hutch, and then you shoved the full ones over. I also had worked at the top of the brae, but I was left at the bottom for a while, and then I was at the top, anyway, these seven full ones came down and pulled the seven empties up, and there was a brake pad on the big wheel, and the man could, when the man pressed the brake band, it was just like putting the brakes on, you see, and that's how they braked it down, and that's what they called the self-acting incline. So I was there for a while, and then when I was, just before I was nineteen, this man asked me, "Would you not.....", we used to work on a Sunday, filling, we used to get a shift on a Sunday, now and again, filling blaes, which...is that,....was what paid the men that were on deficiency, the men that couldn't make wages, the under-manager used....and we used to fill blaes on a Sunday, and it went in as shale, and

maybe somebody was maybe about three tons short of making their wages, well, we would put three tons into them to make up their wages, you see. Well, If they had no blaes, you had to put in money, you see, to make up their wages, because you had a guaranteed wage, to the faceman. I'm talking about the faceman like! Of course, the faceman paid the drawer at that time, out of his pay poke. So I went on the drawing with this man, Jock Ferris was his name, he lived in Blackness, he had an eating house, along at the castle at Blackness. That's where they had a hostel later on, but he lived in this place, and he got trips in, it fed them, and he went on constant nightshift. So I was a week on with him, on the nightshift, and a week on the dayshift with an old man that, Lou Richards was his name, he came from Winchburgh, and I worked a week with old Lou on the dayshift and a week on the nightshift with Jock Ferris, and Tam Turnbull, big Tam Turnbull, he was the drawer that was double shifting. So I was there for a while, and then Jock Ferris....he left the mines, he left the pits, and I hadn't a job, I hadn't a faceman, so I went along with this Jimmy Cormack from Winchburgh, and I was with him for a good two or three years, until his son got killed in the pit. His son got killed with a hutch that ran back on the haulage that I was talking about, and he was standing on the front of a full one, when this other full one ran back, and ran into him, and killed him.

GC Was that in the pit that you were working in?

JD That was in Thirty Five Pit, down at Baird's Bench, in Thirty Five Pit.

GC Can you remember when that was?

JD That was....Wullie Cormack was the lads name...and his father was, as I say, I was working with his father at the time, and his father, when he got killed, his father never came back to the pit! He got a job in Niddry Works, his father, and he didn't come back to the pits. So I got a job with Charlie Sneddon, that was the under-manager's brother, and I was working with him, I worked with him down what they called the wee dook. I worked with him for two or three years. I thought, I'll be at the under-managers for a place. So I had a cousin came back from the Army, and he

wasn't very satisfied, he wasn't getting on with the faceman that he had, so the under-manager gave me a place, and my cousin came and drew off me. So that went on for a while, and then I was cleaning up (inaudible) and that, and och, I was getting shoved about and that, and I was in the Home Guard at the time, and they were all telling me about the good jobs down in White-quarries. That was in 1946. After the war..... I got down to White-quarries and I was down there more or less till Whitequarries shut.

GC Who was the Manager at Whitequarries?

JD The Manager at Whitequarries was Wull.....Wull Pride was his name, Wull Pride, he was the under-manager down there, and Mr. Smith was the Manager. He lived in Uphall, and he was the Manager, as I say, Wull Pride was the under-manager and I got a place down there, and I was there.....

GC And what did you work at, at Whitequarries.....?

JD I was a faceman, but I still had all my own graith, machines, and my..... all my tools and picks and mash and pinch and everything that you needed, to howk shale.

GC Were they hand operated?

JD Aye, at that time they were all hand operated!

GC And the ratchet drills.....?

JD Aye, the ratchet drills, I had both of them. I had a left handed..... I had a right handed machine. A lot of the miners didn't have a left handed machine, but when you were working on the....when you were working on the right hand side, you see, you worked with the....shoving the machine down, your hand down. Well, with the left handed machine, on the right handed side, if you didn't have a left handed machine, on the right handed side, you had to pull it up which was very awkward! So if you had any sense you would....you would have both the right handed machine and the left handed machine and drills, you see.....

GC Had.....you to buy these machines yourself?

JD Of course, you bought all your own graith, you see, and you had to buy the drills as well as the machines you see, which cost you a bob or two and you had to buy all your own explosives, and your own powder can and you had to pay for the strum and even, they even kept the money off for the caps too, that detonated the explosives. So you had all that to make up, and down in....were I was working, in the pit, I'm not sure, in Thirty Five Pit, where I worked first when I was at the face, I think we had about three shillings a ton, and that was what we were paid, three shillings a ton, so you'll know, the wages weren't very big at that time, right enough! But you had to get out about.....nine or ten tons anyway, to pay you, well not as much as that, not as much as that in the pit, because I think it was three and a half tons that paid you per man. So you weren't bad at that!

GC And how many men did you employ....or did you employ then?

JD Well, you had your own drawer, but sometimes maybe if the man next...if the man in the place next to you maybe didn't turn up and his drawer was there, and you were pretty well placed, it was alright if you weren't double shifted, because when you were double shifted, you always knew what you were coming out to the next day! But when you were double shifted you didn't know what you were coming out to the next day, but when.... there was nobody double shifting you, well, you knew what you were coming out to, and sometimes when you were double shifted, sometimes you didn't get a very good start. Anyway.....

GC And did this make a difference to....being double shifted and not double shifted, because of that?

JD Oh, aye, definitely!

GC And when they were double shifted, what things did you find, problems that you weren't expecting to find?

JD Well, somebody....well, you maybe....to take off, you had to take off what you would call a half breaking in a day, that was maybe five or six shots five or six holes that you had to bore. You had to bore three, you had to bore maybe three, what we cried 'Yankees', maybe an occasional four! You had to bore them before piece time, and there was hardly any shale came off them, because they were haulage shots. It was the bench, it was the bench on the tops that you got your shale off of! And if you left them, if you bored a bench on the top, and you fired it at lousing time, and the man that was double shifting you came out, well, he had as much stuff lying there, as very near would do him a whole day! Well, he maybe just bored three 'Yankees", you were coming out, you had to start and bore a bench on the top, before you got any shale. So I mean, it wasn't satisfactory, for anybody that was wanting to get on, and get the stuff away and that! So och, anyway, you were always fit for your work, you were always fit for your work, and you did what you could, and you always made a fair wage. Well, a half decent wage anyway! So that's about all! So as I say, I was in Whitequarries, until there was talk of it shutting down, and I shifted away to the clay mine. I got a job up in the clay mine, as a spare fireman, with Geordie Weir. He was the Manager up there, but I didn't , I was five months up there and it was old Wull Pride, at Whitequarries said it was only a muckhole. That's what all clay mines were, it was only a muckhole! But I got fed up with sifts and that, because I was nightshift and backshift, week about, and I wasn't getting on at all, so I left it and I came back down to the shale mining again, and I got started in the very same place that I had left! And I was there.....

GC Did you get started as a faceman again?

JD Aye, back at the face, in the very same place, and I had, I was there for, .....and I got a drawer, and I was there for about five or six months, when the mine shut down in June. About three weeks before the holidays, the mine shut down! So that was my mining career finished!

GC When you were in Thirty Five, and you started work in Thirty Five, when you

were a laddie, how did you get, where did you stay at that time?

JD Well, when I was a laddie I bid in Uphall, and we used to come in on the pug, but to go in the pug, you had to be up early, and my father went in the pug too, and he would get up about five o'clock, but of course I didn't get up till about half past five, but the pug always left the White Gates at Uphall, it always left there about six o'clock, and you had to be there on the dot, because it was always in on plenty of time, then whenever it was six o'clock, it used to give a couple of toots, and the White Gates opened and away he went, it went up the Lilyburn, away up round by the Lilyburn, and down through, underneath the bridge at Ecclesmachan. Just before you came into Ecclesmachan, between Ecclesmachan and Sunnybank, away down there and across the Skew Bridge, which was over the burn, and down into Niddry Work. And then, it got the Broxburn men there, and they got into the carriages. They were just wee carriages, wooden ones, and there were no windows in them, just a door, and the wooden seats, and the Broxburn men got on, it was going to Thirty Five Pit and some of them went to Glendevon. The Glendevon men got off at the opening at Glendevon at Glendevon Farm, and walked down the road there, down to the....Glendevon. The rest of the men, they got off at Thirty Five Pit, them that worked in the pit, and the carriages went right up on to Fawns Park, that was the wee mine that was down there, and it must have shut down about....round about 1929 or 1930, because it wasn't, it wasn't open long, anyway, after I started working. So the while I was on, the wee while that I was on the oncost, about four years, I'd be on the oncost, and all the different jobs that I was on. We used to come out, as I say, on a Sunday, we used to get a shift on a Sunday, filling blaes, to make up the wages for the miners that weren't....weren't getting out as much stuff as pay their wages, and other jobs. I was just talking about the road, the escape route out of the pit then, was out through Glendevon.

GC That was from number Thirty Five?

JD From Thirty Five Pit through to No.6. Glendevon, and there was a road there an escape road, and they were stepping out all the shale out of Glendevon

so that....it was getting shut down, so they had to dig a shaft at the pit, as an escape route, so, when they were taking a cable down....down the pit, when they started....electrifying the pit, and they took a cable down. They couldn't take it down the pit shaft because it was too narrow, too narrow, so what they did was....they used to take the cable along to Glendevon and they used to take it down No.6. in Glendevon, and the men used to carry it all the way through from Glendevon, through to the pit, along this air route, and that was how they got the cables down the...for the....when they were putting in the electric pumps and that. That was how they got the cables down. So that was....time I was.....when I was on the oncost that was what I.....once I had the job of going along there, to take my share to help carrying the cable down the road. Maybe about fifteen or twenty men, all with about six feet on their shoulder. It was like a big long snake!

GC What size of cable was it?

JD It was a fair size now, it would be about three or four inches thick!

GC In diameter?

JD Aye, in diameter. And this big head roadsman, I just can't mind his name, he was the head roadsman at Glendevon anyway! What was his name....Taffy something or other! I can't remember his name anyway! But he used to take the lead anyway, and you just all got in there and.....

GC You would need quite a few men to pull a cable that size? It would be a heavy cable?

JD Aye, it was a big heavy cable, aye! Aye....we were talking about fatalities, well, when I was in Thirty Five Pit, I was there for twenty years in Thirty Five Pit....and I can only remember of one man actually getting.....well....he didn't get killed in the pit, but there was an explosion .....the fireman was there.....Tommy Bell was the fireman and this Charlie Paris...it was his place, he was the faceman, it was his place that the explosion was in, and he got.....it was a Saturday actually and he got burned and he had....he had swallowed the flames and he died, I

think that he died in the Infirmary, anyway! The two of them were carried up in stretchers up to Hillend Section, away at Hillend section, right down the haulage, they had to be carried on stretchers, and taken to the surface. Tommy Bell...he recovered, but Charlie Paris, he died! That was in Thirty Five Pit, when I was down in Whitequarries, I worked beside big Jimmy Newton he had a place, and I worked beside him, and then he got shifted, and I got shifted, we got separated. So, one day, this old roadsman. Jimmy Porter, he says "Oh dear", he says. "There's been a calamity in the pit". I said "What's wrong Jimmy". He says, That big fellow Newton's been killed!", he says. It was a big long..... this corner of the step had been slack, and.. the two roadsman had been trying to pinch it out, and big Jimmy came out and said "What's wrong" They told him, and he got the pinch and he levered this big bit out, and here it hit a tree, and the tree sprang out, and the corner of the tree got his....got him on the head, and killed him stone dead!

GC Can you remember what year that was?

JD That was when I was in Whitequarries. I don't know when...quite when it was, it was latterly, it was latterly, when I was in Whitequarries, Jimmy Newton was killed....so I think that will do.....

GC Were you a member of a Union?

JD I was a member of the Union all the time, yes!

GC Can you remember who your Union officials were?

JD Well, in Whitequarries, the Union....in Whitequarries, where I was in No.6., we hadn't an official...we had.....Alec Auld was the official at one time, but most of the Union representatives, they worked in No.1, which was the other mine. There was Hughie Boyle...and there was, och, I don't remember all them that were in the Union....Hughie Boyle and John....John...I can't remember his name!

GC It doesn't matter! Did the Union help you at all? Had you any grievances... that they didn't attend to?

JD No....we never had any grievances much, because you could always...if you had any grievances....you went to the Management! They always sort of ironed them out, you know! I think that there was quite a good relationship in the mine, not like....not like what they are with the coal and that, of course, it's different now, the coal's nationalised....and that time, it was private enterprise. I think that's it!

GC And what pastimes did you have? Had you any hobbies or did you have sport of any kind?

JD No, when we were in the pits, I used to go to the....we used to be a member of the Hearts Supporters Club, and we went with them quite a lot, and then of course, you had your holidays and that, you got your holidays! They were balloted usually, because the pits never actually shut down..for the summer holidays like, the pits still kept going on, but you had different months...we all had. And that's about all!

END OF TAPE

Transcript

Mr JD

Industrial  
Information

I started in Thirty Five Pit in October, 1926. I started at the pit bottom. The first day I went down the pit the firemans' box was at the pit bottom just a wee bit away from the shaft, and I just went down there with one of the roadsmen, and he took me to the firemans' box.

Work at Pit Bottom

I was taking the 'tow jiggers' when the hutches were coming in off the endless haulage, taking the jiggers out of the full ones and putting them on the empties, and then sending the empties away on the underground haulage.

Underground Haulage

It was an endless haulage and the rope went right up the shank to the engine house for the endless haulage was up above and the shank was fifty four fathoms deep. It was some size of rope, because it went away down and up hills and down braes. I was on the rollers for a while, and then I got shifted. I was on two or three different jobs.

Brake

I was on a brake up the back of the bottom and I was on the foot of the big break at hillend This was what they called the hillend section of the big brae, and there were seven hutches. It was a self-acting incline

and there were seven full ones  
came down and they pulled seven  
empty ones up the other side  
of the double road, and when  
you pushed the seven hutches,  
they were all coupled up and

Gabbie

they put the gabbie, that was  
the coupling on the end of the  
tow, that's what they called  
the gabbie. But they put the  
gabbie on the last hutch, and  
then you shoved the full ones  
over. I also worked at the  
top of the brae, but I was  
left at the bottom for a while  
and then I was at the top.  
Seven full hutches came down  
and pulled seven empty ones  
up, and there was a brake put  
on the big wheel, and the  
man pressed the brake band,  
it was just like putting  
the brakes on. That's what they  
called 'a self-acting incline'.  
So I was there for a while,  
and then just before I was  
nineteen this man asked me  
if I would like to go filling.

Filling Boxes

We used to get a Sunday now  
and again filling blaes. We  
filled blaes on Sunday, and  
it went in as shale, and  
maybe somebody was about three  
tons short, and we would put  
three tons into them to make  
up their wages.

Drawing

I went on the drawing with  
Jock Ferris. I was a week

on with him on the nightshift and a week on the dayshift with another man called Lou Richards. I hadn't a faceman, so I went along with another chap, and I was with Him for a good two or three years, that was at Thirty Five Pit down at Bairds' Bench. I then got a job with the undermanagers' brother. I worked with him down what they called the 'wee dook' for two or three years. Then my brother came back from the army, and he wasn't getting on with the faceman he had, so the undermanager gave me a place and my cousin drew off me. I was getting shoved about, then I was told about Whitequarries .

Faceman at  
Whitequarries

I was a faceman at Whitequarries, but I still had all my own graith, machines, and all my tools and picks and mash and pinch and everything that you needed to hawk the shale down the mine.

Ratchet Drills

They were ratchet drills, and I had both of them. I had a left-handed and a right-handed. A lot of miners didn't have a left-handed machine, but when you were working on the right-hand side, you worked shoving the machine down with your hand. Well, with a left-

handed machine on a right-handed side you had to pull it up which was very awkward. So if you had any sense you would have both a right and left-handed machine and drills.

#### Buying the Machines

You had to buy all your own graith, and you had to buy the drills as well as the machines. They cost you a bob or two and you had to buy all your own explosives, and your own powder can and you had to pay for your own strum. They kept money off for the caps too, that detonated the explosives, so you had to make that all up.

#### Wages

I am not sure, but in Thirty Five Pit, where I worked first, I think we had about three shillings a ton, so you'll know the wages weren't very big at that time. You had to get about nine or ten tons to pay you well.

#### Number of Men Employed

You had a drawer, but sometimes if the next man didn't turn up and his drawer was there, and you were pretty well placed, it was alright if you weren't double shifted, you always knew what you were coming out to the next day, but when there was nobody double shifting you it made quite a difference.

#### Boring Holes 'Yankees'

Sometimes you had to take off what you would call a half breaking in a day, that was

maybe five or six shots, five or six holes that you had to bore maybe three, what we cried, 'Yankees'. You had to bore them before piece time, and there was hardly any shale came off them, because they were haulage shots. It was the bench on the tops that you got the shale off. If you left them and you bored a bench on the top, and you fired it at lousing time, and the man that was double shifting you came out, he had a much stuff lying there as would do him a whole day. Maybe he just bored three 'Yankees', and you were coming out, you had to start and bore a bench on the top before you got any shale. So you were always fit for your work, and you did what you could, and you always made a fair wage. I was at Whitequarries until there was talk of it shutting down.

Clay Mine

I then shifted to a clay mine. I was only there for five months and I was fed up, so I left it and went back to shale mining again.

Restarted as Faceman

I got back to the face, in the very same place as before. But I was only there five or six months and the mine shut down in June. So that was my mining career finished.

## Accidents

The only accident I remember was when I was fourteen and a half, the pony driver missed his snibbles, and the rake ran away from him and one of the hutches went into the sump. So that was an accident right away, you could say. When I was in Thirty Five Pit, I can also remember one fatality. It was an explosion and one man got burned and he died in the Infirmary. Two more were carried up on stretchers to Hillend section, and taken to the surface. Tommy Bell recovered, but Charlie Paris died.

## Accident in the Pit

I can also remember there was a calamity in the pit. A chap called Newton was killed. It was a step where the corner was slack and two roadmen had been trying to pinch it out, and big Jimmy came out and asked what was wrong. He was told, and he got the pinch and he levered this big bit out, and it hit a tree and the tree sprang out and got him on the head and killed him stone dead.

## Union

I was a Union member. Most of the Union representatives worked in No. 1 which was the other mine.

## Grievances

We never had any grievances,

because if you had any you went to the Management. They always sort of ironed them out.

Holidays

We got holidays which were usually balloted, because the pits never actually shut down for the summer holidays.

## PLACE INDEX

Blackness - Side One Page 2  
Broxburn - Side One Page 7  
Ecclesmachan - Side One Page 7  
Glendevon - Side One Page 8  
Lilyburn - Side One Page 8  
Skew Bridge - Side One Page 7  
Sunnybank - Side One Page 7  
Uphall - Side One Page 1,4  
Whitequarries - Side One Pages 4,6,9  
Winchburgh - Side One Page 2

## INDEX OF CONTENTS

|                     |   |                            |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------|
| AULD, Alec          | - | Side One Page 9            |
| Baird's Bench       | - | Side One Page 3            |
| BEATTIE, Jimmy      | - | Side One Page 1            |
| BELL, Tommy         | - | Side One Pages 8,9         |
| Bench               | - | Side One Page 6            |
| Blaes               | - | Side One Pages 2,7         |
| BOYLE, Hughie       | - | Side One Page 9            |
| CORMACK, Wullie     | - | Side One Page 3            |
| Dook                | - | Side One Page 3            |
| FERRIS, Jock        | - | Side One Page 3            |
| Graith              | - | Side One Page 5            |
| Home Guard          | - | Side One Page 4            |
| Mash                | - | Side One Page 4            |
| NEWTON, Jimmy       | - | Side One Page 9            |
| Oncost              | - | Side One Page 7            |
| PARIS, Charlie      | - | Side One Pages 8,9         |
| Pinch               | - | Side One Page 4            |
| PORTER, Jimmy       | - | Side One Page 9            |
| PRIDE, Wull         | - | Side One Page 4            |
| Pug                 | - | Side One Page 7            |
| Ratchet drill       | - | Side One Page 4            |
| Rake                | - | Side One Page 1            |
| Roller Section      | - | Side One Page 1            |
| Self Acting Incline | - | Side One Page 2            |
| SNEDDON, Charlie    | - | Side One Page 3            |
| SNEDDON, Jock       | - | Side One Page 1            |
| Snibbles            | - | Side One Page 1            |
| Sump                | - | Side One Page 1            |
| Thirty Five Pit     | - | Side One Pages 1,3,5,6,7,8 |
| Tow Jiggers         | - | Side One Page 2            |
| Tree                | - | Side One Page 9            |
| TURNBULL, Tam       | - | Side One Page 3            |
| Yankees             | - | Side One Page 6            |