

JM

SIDE ONE

A. Well I started in Duddingston, that was in 1925, and at that time Bob Harper was the General Manager, and George Dewar was the Under-Manager of the No. 1 Mine, and Wullie Thornton was the Manager in No. 3 Mine. There was No. 1 Mine and No. 3 Mine at Duddingston at that time, when I started first of all, as a labourer. I worked then with the blacksmith whose name was John Henderson, and he was a first class tradesman! And I was there, and I worked with Jock for about six years, thereafter I was moved into underground to look after the pit ponies, and I was there for oh.....the oil industry and the mining industry was running down in the Oakbank district and the Broxburn area, and Philpstoun area, and we went off in the 1930's, '35, and we were working a whole week.....a whole month then, and they brought some of these other miners in to take up the unemployment situation, whereby each man worked a three week and then he had a week on the dole, which introduced an additional man to take up the job out of every four, so that every four weeks, each man got a week off, so I was on that.... for.....oh, I can't really remember now, it must have been about nine or ten years, and thereafter I was moved up to be the surface foremanand then I was on the horses then, and then I got moved up to surface foreman after Tottlywells mine, which was another wee pit, and the Under-Manager's name there was John Gibb, and by this time of course, the mines had changed because, McArthur had died and George Dewar had died and Bertie Keddie came in as Manager then at the mines, and John Gibb got Dewar's job. And I went on from then up to Tottlywells and Bert Keddie was moved as General Manager thereafter looking after all this area, and Davie Caldwell came down from the Roman Camps to be the Manager in No. 3 Mine after that, and then I was moved from Tottlywells from weighing the hutches on the pithead to be surface foreman over Tottlywells and Duddingston mines then. And we had quite a busy time at that time, industry was going very well, Wullie Thornton then got hurt and died and a man the name of Andrew.....along at Glendevon.. Andrew McDonald.....he came to Duddingston to be Under-Manager there

and he was there until such time as it finished off, but I left the mines in January 1951, and that's about as much as I can tell you, but the industry was going quite good at that time, but thereafter between the fifties and the sixties it began to run down in the shale oil industry because they were beginning to get oil in, with the oil tankers to Grangemouth, then the shale industry began to be.....running off as far as the mining industry was concerned.

Q. What can you tell me then, you say that you were with the horses!

A. Well, I was with the horses in the.....between the.....the late thirties I was on with the horses, and I would be on the horses for oh.....about seven or eight years at least, and then I was taken out of there and put on to weighing the miners shale coming off this wee pit at Tottlywells, and I was moved from there to be surface foreman thereafter, and I was ten years surface foreman, and then I left in January 1951, and I was twenty five years there.

Q. So, when you were with the horses what were your duties?

A. Well, my duties were to get down there in the morning, the first thing and have them all fed and watered and ready for the pony drivers coming down at half past six every morning, and you had a shift went out at half past six every morning, and they got their feed away with them, they didn't come in during the day, they didn't come back till two o'clock! It was my job to get them.....get them all prepared in the morning for the boys coming down and whilst they were out at their work, there would be twelve out at their work, and my job was to clean the stables and have the additional twelve ready for the afternoon shift to go out at half past two, and at that time, of course, you would be getting your feeding down and clean out the stable, up to the surface and all that sort of thing to do, and there was another man shifted me, he came on at half past two and took over till ten o'clock at night, and he shut up at half past ten at night and I was down there in the morning again, and there was the feeding stuff to get down, and

the stables to clean and see if there were any injuries, sometimes... well, there wasn't an awful lot there was a guilty thing of being ponies getting nails in their feet, with the nails being nailed down in the pits where the wee bogeys ran, there were often nails sprung out and the horse could pick it up in it's feet.....

Q. What feed did you give them? What feed.....food.....did you give them?

A. They were fed oats and bran, and they weren't allowed any long hay! All the hay that they got..... they got hay just like an ordinary horse, but it was all chopped, cut short, you see, when it went down, in case of fire. You see, and it was all bagged, very short hay that they got, all chopped up, and all your feeding stuff went down in bags, and this was in case of fire. Equally the same, they weren't.....they didn't have their bed made by straw, or hay, it was moss litter, and this again was in case of fire, there were so many naked lights in these days, there weren't so many electric lights, it was mostly naked lights we worked in! So, the horses were all bedded down with moss litter, and fed on short hay.

Q. Now, when you picked a horse for the pits, was he picked for his weight, height, or had they to be a certain age?

A. Well, they were mostly..... they were usually over four years old, they weren't allowed too young down the pits, it maybe five or six, but the youngest that you would get would be four years old, now they had to be certain heights for certain areas, that they were working. You had some big horses, about fifteen hands but there were more twelve hands than fifteen hands. In closer workings, you see, you didn't have the height for the ponies to go to, you see, they were short and they were like the Highland ponies, because it was a short.....short stocky wee fellow, you know, hardy, and there were mostly the kind that we worked with!

Q. Now, you say that they were left overnight?

A. Undoubtedly, underground, they never came up!

Q. Were they locked in the stable or.....?

A. Tied up, just normally, like an ordinary horse, they had proper stables made, you see, stalls, brick stalls built, and brick walls with corrugated roofing over the top of them, with steel girders to carry the roof, and the stables were very good, electric light, they had all these facilities in them!

Q. What about air, ventilation?

A. Oh, there was plenty of ventilation! There was both ventilation coming down, and then you had the fans drawing the bad air out up the other shaft, but the ventilation was very good.

Q. And how often did they see the light of day? Those ponies?

A. Well, in Duddingston Mines, they were fortunate in as much as it wasn't a pit, it was what you would call a mine, so they didn't go down a shaft, they actually walked down, so that these ponies that I was looking after, the blacksmiths came down if it was a loose shoe, he just came down the mine and tightened the shoe up and down there, but if the pony was really needing four new shoes, or two new shoes, the hammersman came down and he took the pit pony up the pit to the surface and into the blacksmiths shop on the surface, and then put its new shoes on and brought it back down.

Q. Did they cover his eyes?

A. No.....underground, they had a big leather mat on their forehead, you see, attached to.....between their ears and down, and two eye shields came over the top of their eyes, so that anything falling from the roof

would hit the leather under the shield and 'skid' it off their eyes.

We didn't have any lashes or muzzles over the top of their eyes, nothing like that, just a mask.....a leather pad, actually, sown on to the cap, which diverted anything scaling from the roof off the horses eyes.

Q. When they went up to the surface to the light, did the daylight hurt their eyes?

A. Oh, they just about went daft, especially if they were young, whenever they saw the light of day, they just used to kick their own height, and once a year, we had an agricultural show in Linlithgow, so the cream of the ponies then..... they were picked out, and they were taken to the show and there was a class for nothing else but ponies and they came from the various mines round about, from Glendevon, from Thirty Five pit, and from Whitequarries Mine, as well as Duddingston and that way.....

Q. And would then.....you were then known as an ostler so, would you then receive the prize?

A. No, the pit pony driver.....you know, the boy who drove the pony, he got the prize!

Q. Although you looked after the horses?

A. Aye, that's right.....oh, the pony driver got the prize! That was right!

Q. And who groomed the horses?

A. Well, the boys groomed them themselves when they came in at night, and before they went out in the morning.

Q. Now in the case of.....were there ever any accidents in the mine, you know, where a horse was involved?

A. Occasionally.....occasionally that we got an accident, maybe a foot jammed between a hutch or something, or maybe some of them ran away, you see, some of them took a turn and went on.....where the bypass was, midway, where there would possibly be two or three horses working, and there would only be a single line and then there would be a bypass, you see, so sometimes if there was another one ran through the bypass, because when the boys that were called pony drivers, they just didn't drive the ponies as such, the ponies drove themselves, they knew the road! And they had a light, they worked with a twelve foot chain, from their tail to the first bogey, and there was a light in that first bogey, as the pony didn't have a light as such on its forehead in our mine, and the pony went with the light on this first bogey, and there was twelve foot chain there and the pony driver worked at the very end of the train, because if he didn't work at the end of the chain, the hutches got buffered up, and if you came to a corner, they just went off the rails, where they worked on the back and they worked with a 'sprag' in it, what they called a snibble in the pits, and this kept all thein between all the hutches taut, all the couplings were taut, you see, there were never any looseness because if they got loose, the buffers got one in the back of each other and got twisted and they twisted off the rails! So the pony driver was named as such, but the pony actually worked itself after it knew..... there was always somebody started them off, you see, with them for two or three weeks until they got to know the road right, thereafter they got to.....go themselves! And the pony driver.....well, he may have six trucks on as a 'rake' or he may have ten, and maybe as high as twelve I've seen, it depended on the camber of the road, whatever state the road was! If it was reasonably level, there were no problems arising at all, but sometimes they had to go up a wee hill on to a level, and you had to come back down that hill again, you see, that's when you needed a snibble on the back end, you know, to keep all the couplings taut.

Q. But if the gradient was steep and the horses.....did they put the horses at the front or the horses at the back, on the steep gradients?

A. Well..... they were never as steep as that! They never were as steep as that! They came out..... there was a wee bit gradient on a lot of them, but where it was very steep.....it was very steep..... the horses only would bring up one wee bogey you see, one at a time up the steepest gradient, but then, the bogey ran down there itself, and the pony ran down at the back. He never was in the front on these, and as time went on, they put an engine up there, an electric engine, and it took care of the steep gradient up and down, and it brought a full one..... or an empty one, when the horse was there, the horse only came up with one at a time! Where the gradient was very steep, which was very few in my time!

Q. But on the flat.....on the flat road, how many hutches would.....?

A. Oh.....on a flat road, the big horses would go with ten! Ten..... and the smaller workings, where the roof was low, like, the ponies would go with about six! Six or eight!

Q. How.....what is their working life in the pit?

A. Well, like the human body.....it depends on what like they are..... some of them could go quite long, some of them could go ten or twelve years, some of them were much older than that! We had a wee white pony that was about eighteen, and it must have been about 15 years in the pit, and in very good condition. Very good condition!

Q. Did they never contract anything from being so far out of the daylight?

A. Not really! Not really! I never saw any particular.....I've seen their 'wind' going from time to time, odd ones you know! But you get that with horses on the surface, too, where their lungs and wind get affected, but not very many! The worst thing that we had, was for as far as infection was greasy legs, where they were continually ploughing about in water, you know, their legs got dirty and greasy, and they never could heal them up! Because they were always damp and ploughing

through water, you see!

Q. So, what did you do in a case like that?

A. Well, we got veterinary treatment for them, then.

Q. Now, was it a local vet or was he employed by the firm?

A. It would be the local..... the local vet from Linlithgow, he came as and when he was required!

Q. Was it purely male horses that you employed, or did you also employ mares?

A. No, we never had mares! Never, never, in my lifetime! They didn't really approve of them in the pits, and I never knew any pit or mines where there was any mares, they were always horses!

Q. Was there a special reason for that?

A. Well, it was just the seasons and things like that!

Q. Yes, I see! Now, you then.....accidentally became a checkweighman!

A. I was a checkweighman.....no, not really a checkweighman, I was the Company's pitheadman!

Q. Oh yes!

A. And the Company..... there was pitheadman on the pithead, you see, but the checkweighman was a man employed by the miners, to see that they got their right wage, and the hutches were run over the bridge! This man was standing beside them and we took note, but he also took note of the weight as well! At the end of the day, you put your book in

to the office, and the miners wages were made up, and you could check as to whether you had got the right weight, the same weight as the checkweighman.

Q. Yes, it may sound an odd question to ask, but, what was the need....
I mean there must have been some weighman either who cheated or something, because, what was the need of a checkweighman.....?

A. Well.....in the early days, that's right! There had been suspicion about the pitheadman's weights you see, and as the miners got stronger, they selected a man themselves and appointed him and paid him, and he went up there, he had permission from the Company, to go and stand in the weighbox, alongside me, and see every hutch that was weighed....

Q. Yes, to make sure it was right!

A. Yes, that's right!

Q. Now, each miner or each drawer had a token or a pin?

A. That's right, it was a token!

Q. How, how in heavens name, did you remember whose it was?

A. Well.....quite easily, after you were there for a wee while, because each man had his token, you see, and every hutch that came up, there was a token on the hutch, and you had various.....it went by numbers and you had a row of nails along and pegs, with all their numbers there, you see, and when they came up, you hung them on there..... the pin on the nail, and at the end of the day, the miner, when he was finished his work, and when he came up the pit, he came up and collected all these, and if he didn't collect them then, he collected them first thing in the morning, and took them away down the pit with him, down the mine, and he put a tag on each hutch as it came up, and you had

all these mens' names and their token number, alongside it in the pit book, where they registered the weight.

Q. Now, a crew.....a crew would be about two facemen and two drawers...?

A. No.....well, aye, no really.....as such, there were two facemen and two drawers, but they were different shifts.....

Q. Yes!

A. That's right!

Q. This.....did they use the same pin?

A. They usually used the same pin.....aye, that was what you called double shifting you see, so I would be in the place in the morning and you would be in the place in the afternoon, but we would both have the same pin! That's right!

Q. So.....now, what about crowpickers.....about scavengers and.....
Did you ever come across that? A crowpicker or scavenger, you know sometimes that you used to empty a hutch because there was a lot of dirt there in them!.....

A. Oh aye, well again..... the Company had two men up on the pithead beside me, and that was their job, and if the Manager or the Under-Manager thought that these men were filling dirt, they would give you a number, give you this man's number, and he came up, and the Under-Manager would come up and say, 'Take that man's stuff to the side', and you would take that man's stuff right through, you didn't put it down the tumbler, into the breaker, you put it through a place, these two men had a place on the top of the pithead, and they emptied that, and they inspected it, and took the good shale out and they put the dirt to the side, and the good shale was weighed again, backweighed, and the dirt was weighed

and it was put out on the surface on the pithead, and was taken down from the pithead, put on the surface and it was laid there for the man to see what he had filled, and if it was real dirt you know, and plenty of it, he got maybe a weeks suspension, or three days suspension, it depended on the nature of the stuff.

Q. And was this a regular occurrence?

A. Yes, oh yes! It was a regular occurrence, oh aye! It was a daily routine, really! A daily routine.....in the shale industry.....I don't know about the coal, but in the shale industry, it was a daily routine.

Q. Why do you think those men filled dirt, if they have a bad place or was it quicker for tonnage?

A. Well, that's a kind of awkward question.....but it's true to say that if a man was in a bad place, or if he wasn't, or if he was hard going, if he could find a hutch of shale lying on the side of the road, further on the way into the place, the drawer would just fill a hutch and put a pin on it, as if it came from his own place and send it up and take a chance!

Q. Oh, I see!

A. Whilst they might get some good stuff that had fallen from the roof, or burst from the sides, you see, sometimes you would get a good hutch or two, other times it would be dirt! They'd help themselves of course, and if the Manager caught them at that, of course, they got word sent right from where it was, and would send word right up to the pithead, that they had pulled somebody's hutches aside and inspected them, and this is what they did!

Q. So you really had a group of men, who shall remain nameless, but a group of men that had a habit of doing this?

A. Oh, well, from time to time! That's right, depending on their wages, if your circumstances was kind of tight, then they would do that sort of thing! I wouldn't like to say that it was common practice with them, although there were some that would do it, without any problem at all. In fact, maybe during the night there would be a fall from the roof somewhere, and it would need to be cleaned up, well, if the Company's men were cleaning it, and the miners going in or the drawers going in and seeing something that he thought was quite reasonably good, he would take a chance and put a pin on it, and send it on.

Q. So, what other duties did you have? Other than as a pitheadman?

A. Well, my duties were to see that everything was weighed, and weighed correctly! And they would never, when I got to know where I was workingit was very seldom that I ever dealt with half hundredweights because if it was a half hundredweight over, fair enough, it was a half a hundredweight under, then you gave them the benefit of the doubt! Made it the round hundredweight!

Q. A few of the miners have mentioned that, I think it was in Tottlywells, they had to fill the hutch.....no, they had to fill twenty-two hundred-weight to a ton. What was the idea behind that?

A. Well, the idea behind that was that.....taking two hundredweight of dirt, and they allowed two hundredweight each, you had to fill twenty-two hundredweight, if the Company was taking two hundredweight worth of dirt, it wasn't good shale, dross like coal, you know, just like muck, stuff that you wouldn't get any oil from, and that was the idea of that, was that you filled twenty two hundredweight to the ton. Usually it was twenty one, but in Tottlywells, it was twenty two, right enough!

Q. Twenty two?

A. Aha!

- Q. So, really, if the men.....I don't say again that they all did, but if the men in fact, filled up twenty two hundredweight of pure shale, they lost out!
- A. That's right! That's right!
- Q. (Inaudible).
- A. Overall, I think, between the Union and the Management, they would be reasonable like that, but I would reckon..... they would be reasonable
- Q. Now, it's really basically I've seen the other side?
- A. Yes, that's right!
- Q. I've been told the miners side of it, now I am seeing the other side, which is why I'm asking.....
- A. Aye, you would get the miners side, right enough! But that was the idea, that they were allowed.....at Tottlywells, for example that was one place that they didn't have anybody looking after the shale..... the dirt..... taking some miner, you see, you selected some miners, and then run it through, and of course, from time to time, you were instructed by the Under-Manager to keep your eye on such and such a place, you see, and take this man's stuff through and inspect it and see that.....sometimes it was alright of course, it wasn't a general thing that you had somebody on the carpet everyday! Or every week for that matter, but from time to time it did happen that you had to put the stuff through and of course if dirt was there you had to put it down on the surface, so that the miner could see it when he came up, and if it was very bad of course, they were drawn into the office and they got two or three days suspension.
- Q. So you.....would you say that your position was really.....uncomfortable

.....your job?

- A. Well.....I would say that generally it was reasonable.....it was reasonable, you had the awkward person, you know, and you would always have the other fellow saying that he had even more tags up than what he had.....more tokens you know, you would say he had fifteen or sixteen up and he would say, I've sixteen.....well, if you've sixteen, the other one must be down the mine.....and he would say, no it's not down the mine.....because there's none of my pins down the mine, when I left, so it's up here, so it should be there.....but on general cases, very reasonable. There were one or two awkward ones, but in general in the shale industry, we didn't have much trouble!
- Q. So, when you met an awkward situation, how did you deal with it, because, I mean it must be very difficult?
- A. Oh well..... they'd got to go down to the office, and it was your word against the miners word then.....you'd have to battle it out between the Manager and yourself.....and he was arguing his point, and of course you were arguing your point! So, you would sort it out.....but I never had many of these awkward situations.....I had one or two but..... very few!
- Q. Yes, that's good! I'm seeing the other side now! That's the Company's side!
- A. That's right! Well, I didn't have many of these awkward situations, very few of them, and as I say, I had one or two.....but apart from that, everything ran quite smoothly.....
- Q. So again.....as you talk about the breaker.....were you in charge of that as well..... the breaker.....you know.....where you used to break the shale up?
- A. Yes.....yes.....at Tottlywells, I was in charge of the breaker as

well, that's right! That was your responsibility.....your responsibilityand of course, you had four boys there as well, they had a boy in Duddingston Mine, you had a boy taking the chain off the hutch, when it came in, you see and it ran into the pithead, and you had a man looking for the boy who stopped it there, he took the pin off, because you were in the wee office, you see, he handed it in the window to you, and you checked the weight, and then it went on to what they called the turntable, and it went on there and it went and it went on to a tunnel, burlled right round about and the breaker was underneath, and that burlled right round about and when it came back up it was empty, and you pushed it through to another boy, and he sent it on it's way to another lad, on the other side, and he put another chain on it and sent away down the mine itself again, you see! You had one chain for pulling it up the one way coming up and you had also the chain, the same chain going down the way, holding it back from running away, or going down the hill empty.

Q. So this is what they call the endless haulage?

A. The endless haulage, that's right!

Q. Now, how many tons.....how many tons of shale could the breakers deal with?

A. Oh.....they would be doing..... there wouldn't be nothing like this in Tottlywells but in Duddingston Mines, there used to be about five or six hundred tons a day, oh aye!

Q. And how big.....how big are the pieces, which came out of the breaker?

A. Oh.....about nine inches by four inches, something like that, when they came out of the breaker!

Q. Just an ordinary stone?

A. Just an ordinary stone! Yes! Because they came into a wagon, there was about two hutches to the wagon, and there was about two tons.... this wagon came up, up to the workshop I was in, and it was square on the top, but after you went eighteen inches down, then it went in to a sloped bottom, sloped down and there was a door there, you see, and there was a handle on the one side and it came right up to the workshop and it went up a scaffolding to the top of the retorts, and there was a door underneath, and the handles fixed on to that door, came out and then came up, and the man up on the retorts just pushed this handle backwards and forwards, and the shale ran down right into the retorts and then ran down, so there was no problem arising there, it just went right round the tunnel and then it went down, down the chute, and a man stood at the bottom, pulled the big chute door and it just sloshed right down in to the big wagons, there was about two tons, thirty five hundred-weight to two tons, in each of these wagons, that came up to the workshop, and then they were pulled by wee electric trollies, and they took twenty at a time up.....

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