

JP

JP The Winchburgh works was one of the biggest in West Lothian, we had what we term four benches and these were halved in two. They were called the top four and bottom four benches.

Q. What year was this?

JP 1957 and previous to that I was in the pits. I started in 1957 and I was there for about 8 years.

Q. What made you change from the pits to the Oil Works?

JP To be quite honest with you I was working one day when I was only 17 ½ or 18 and was working down the Roman Camp, it was a Saturday and the roof and the shale was 2 or 3 times as high as the coal. A piece of shale fell about 15 feet and I just took my helmet off to wipe the sweat off, I was finished for the day.

Q. Was it a hard helmet or a soft one (Keddie).

JP It was a hard helmet and I took it off just to wipe my head and a bit fell off the roof and I had to have 16 stitches, Well I said if I am going to die I may as well die in the army, instead of dying down here, so I went and joined the army, I was there for 7 years. I came out and got married in 1950 and I started the shale works then.

Q. Did you find it easy to get a job in the Shale mines.

JP Yes, it was one of the greatest jobs I ever had, nobody bothers you, as long as you are doing your work of course. I started on the retorts with a wage of about £8 a week and if you worked up the tip you got the biggest wage, so I decided to have a go at the tip, which in the winter was a very hard job and a dangerous job as well, because there was always a chance of you getting blown over. The rails at the head of the tip they were white hot, and you used to have an old cap on and an old piece of duster tucked in, so you bent forward and you lifted the hutch at the same time so that the stuff went down the tip.

Q. Was it a hutch or a boggie?

JP We called them hutches. We had two types there, one type you tipped it straight up and over and the other way you tipped it sideways and it went over.

Q. In Westwood they had a plate at the top which you could in fact turn.

JP That is right, you turned that plate and we used to cover it with oil so that it would turn easier. I came back off the tips into the retorts and I was learning to be a foreman there. It was very interesting in the retorts because you had to watch the timing of the shale going from A to B and there was a small hole that you could look through and you would see it burning steadily, now when it was going well and you got everything out of the shale it was dull red, but when you saw it turning white hot you were in trouble, that meant that the shale was sticking or getting hung up between A & B so therefore to stop the gases going through you had a valve at the top of the benches you put it down and cut off all the gas coming

out of that bench, you went down below on the ground level and there were three or four of us who took a small metal plate off and you looked up this metal plate and you could actually see where the shale was getting hung up and was not working properly.

Q. Was that because the steam was too hot?

JP Yes, that is right and we had, it all depends on the distance you were away, there was 4 or 5 big long steel rods that were bent in the middle, about 1 inch thick. We used to find the length of rod we needed for length and move it back and forward up through this hole until the shale came away, it came out in a big cloud of gas and smoke and everything, sparks, dirt, red dot ashes. Once you got it working again what we did then was the parts that were sticking we used to have an arm, they worked on an arm these retorts, slowly very slowly we used to have a sort of key that fitted on to this arm and you turned this arm round quickly until all the shale that was causing all the trouble was out onto a belt, and when you got the green shale coming through that was it okay. So you went back up the stairs, lifted, up the valve and filled it up with shale again and that was okay. We have men up the top of the retorts and it was their job to fill these and we had eight, we have four halves No. 1.2.3,4. we had either 8 or 10, No's from 8 to 10,12,14. and these men's job was to fill these every day. Now, the best of the shale in these days you did not have to work eight hours, as soon as these retorts were full you went home. Now I have seen on a Saturday starting at 12 o'clock and be finished at 2 o'clock and go home with a full day's wages because you had to work hard, it was not easy and I did that as well and as I said before and learned to be a foreman and learned the retorts and shale, what came out the shale and the timing to see that there was not too much steam going through, too much steam and you were in

trouble and not enough steam and you were still in trouble. Now you had to check all these retorts go in, through even though when they come under the belt there was men working on the big wheel you opened it up with your foot and the shale came out and you had to watch the colour of that shale, now if that shale was coming out green you had to slow that one up because you were losing gas and you were losing all the produce coming out off the gas. So what we did was we lifted the arm off and stopped that retort from working so the shale started to burn, lay it off for about an hour it all depends on what colour the shale was, if it was pure green you laid it off for more than that, then we would put it back on again, give it a couple of turns and you would see that the shale had turned brown, like you see on the bings. As you know, it went from there to what we call Naphtha plant and that plant produced the naphtha, paraffin oil, soap and all these different things that came of the oil, also sulphate of ammonia and that was worth its weight in gold. I do not know if you know how they discovered the soap. There was one chap out, round about the Pumpherston area I believe and he washed his hands in the burn and his hands came out soapy, now that soap had been lost for years and years and nobody knew about it.

Q. So that would come from the water, the cooling water.

JP Yes, that is right when he washed his hands and saw the soap that was termed as a by-prod as you know. Why these works closed down I don't think that there is anybody still alive that could tell you, because they paid their way, there is no argument about that, as a matter of fact the Americans were going to come across and start them up again. Round about the Winchburgh area you have got the 35 pit and I don't know if you know this, Duddingston, Tottlywells, Whitequarries and Niddrie. You had another work... at Niddrie and that closed down.

Q. You had open cast as well.

JP Yes, opencast is there on the left hand side before you come to what we term the 'Old Baths' at Niddry. It is very interesting for somebody like yourself to have a walk in that area and even to-day and many people in Winchburgh could point out the exact spot where everything was in these days. It was a brilliant place to work. You will know about the bomb that dropped there during the war?

Q. No.

JP During the war, my father-in-law was working at the tip, he worked in the oil works for 41 years and so what he does not know is nobody's business.

Q. Is he still alive?

JP Yes, I can take you down there anytime. Now a land mine dropped right in the centre of Winchburgh Works, it split one of the big chimneys and that is all the damage that it did, blew out all the windows of the houses in Winchburgh. It never touched the works and the works never lost an hour's work, it just kept going.

Q. Was it meant for the works do you think?

JP Yes, we believe that the German's knew that Winchburgh Works were there and they were out to get it. but they missed it, that was the only time there was a bomb dropped on Winchburgh Works. If it had landed, well I don't know it is difficult to judge, but mind the German pilot he dropped

it right smack on target, he knew what he was doing, and yet he could not see a thing because up the tip in these days as I say the shale was white hot but it was kept cool so it would not glow in the dark for the German bombers to see, but as I say my father-in-law was there for 41 years and he joined, the oil works when he was 14, then it closed down after 41 years and he went somewhere else, he was 81 last month, so he had no complaints, and that was the biggest disaster I think to Winchburgh and the surrounding areas, when that place closed down it put a lot of men out of work. The whole of West Lothian suffered, because to be honest with you it could have paid until today it could have. As I said Winchburgh produced the best and the most out of a ton of shale.

Q. Can you remember the quantity?

JP No, but I can let you know tomorrow, because we used to test it, I mean the memory lapse after all these years. Now, Tottlywells, Whitequarries, (that wasn't an old mine) Duddingston they were all producing the best of shale when they closed down. I can't argue about the Roman Camps, No. 6 and No.7, one was a pit and one was a mine, but they still produced. Now for anybody to say that it's only poor shale that's lying under there now, or even just after it closed, I don't believe it. In the later stages of Winchburgh there was a dreadful a very dreadful mistake made by the management. If you let too much air into these retorts, the shale will go solid, with too much air. You had to get the right amount of air in and that is what happened to Winchburgh Works. It was a very big mistake and maybe my father-in-law can answer this question. Now I worked in this at the time and we worked night and day trying to get that works going again, and that was the downfall of Winchburgh Works, through the management, not the people, the whole retorts, benches, the majority were stickers, what

we call stickers, as I said. The shale was suspended and it got solid absolutely solid, they broke into the brickwork to get it down to get that working, it was quite a job, it was a back breaking job.

Q. Do you think that would be one of the reasons why, when Westwood was built in 1939 they devised new retorts almost automatic retorts, automatic, air, infiltration, steam.

JP Yes, that was one of the reasons I think that one of the reasons.

Q. It was a bit late.

JP Yes, a wee bit late, and that was the biggest mistake. Now, Winchburgh as I've said had 8 benches, 4 in each half, 16 retorts. There was over half of them at one time were stickers, Now when you get that, that's not producing, if you're not producing, you're not burning the shale. So if you're not burning the shale, you're not getting rid of the shale. And that was the downfall, maybe I could be wrong, maybe someone in Winchburgh has a better answer than me, but I worked in it at the time and day by day you were coming out, you may get one sticker away, you came out at night you may get another two sticking up. They were breaking into the brickwork and I think really that was the downfall.

Q. Would you put it down to the poor workmanship of the retorts, if as you have said, the men, the engineers were good at their jobs?

JP No, what they tried to do, when they try to repair, when the brickwork has began to go on one of the retorts and they have tried to repair it they've got to back that up so that there is not too much air that gets in. If that is not done properly, then air gets drawn into all the

retorts and that's what happened. The actual workmen knew their job, how to run the retorts because as I said to you earlier, we could spot straightaway when we had a sticker, because when it turned pure white, we knew there was trouble, they closed that one down, took it down and went to work on it. But when you get more than half of them, the longer they are up there the harder and harder they are going to get. The more they are burning the more solid they are going to get and they are just out of commission, and that's what happened, it wasn't the quality of the shale.

Q. How do you then explain, the closing down of Westwood, I mean, Westwood was a brand new work, what about Pumpherston, Broxburn?

JP You see when they really needed the oil they could have done with Broxburn. When they got all that trouble with Winchburgh they said, what's the good, we're beat, we're taxed, and the amount of work it's going to take to get it working again. Lord Hopetoun lost a lot of money for, I remember that for every hutch that came out of Duddingston, Whitequarries, Tottlywells and that area, 6d.

Q. Was he not very particular about the setting up of the mines through his estate? I read somewhere that the hutches had to be painted green.

JP Yes, let's face it, Lord Hopetoun even the Lord Hopetoun from when they (the mines) just opened, even to now the people of Winchburgh think that they are great people, because they did a lot for Winchburgh.

Q. Do you mean Scottish Oils?

JP Yes, Lord Hopetoun, Scottish Oils, I mean we have got a bowling green there and he's now granted permission for the Golf Course to go ahead on his property. Well you might say that Lord Hopetoun was one of the boys. It was a sorry day when the works closed down.

Q. What did the men do, where did they find employment?

JP The only place you could go was Edinburgh.

Q. What about BMC (British Leyland) in Bathgate, was that too far to travel?

JP No, some of them went to BMC, but it wasn't the same, because you had some of these miners they'd been down the pits for 30 or 40 years it's the only thing they knew. Can you imagine a miner that's been down the pit for 30 or 40 years to get into a factory, he wouldn't know where to turn. It's the same as my father-in-law who got a job in Grangemouth he was lost because I can remember, they were great lads, my father-in-law is the only one that's still alive, there's old Neil Davidson and another chap called "Bomber" Brown, another chap called Jack Russel who received a military medal in 1914-18, I've seen them going out on a Saturday night and they have been drunk as a Lord, but they were no trouble, when doing their job. My father-in-law worked on the tips at that time and old Neil Davidson used to work with him, I used to put Neil to sleep and got to do the job for him, but they were great, great lads. Even down the pit, we used to muck in and help each other. Even when I was a laddie, I worked down the pit and I used to go in my piece time and fill a hutch for some of the miners, they used to give me 2/6, we used to help them, they got paid for it, you got paid for it, I mean you never done anybody, the stuff was there for to fill the hutches with. You would sit and have your piece, blether away and back in again. But you never thought much of it, it was hard work, there's no getting away from it, you had to work hard, because you were paid so much per hutch and you had to make your own wages. If you had a good place to work you were O.K.

Q. When you worked in the mine, what mine was it?

JP I started at 14 at Duddingston, I went from there to Roman Camps, at

16 ½ I wasn't earning enough.

Q. At 14, what position, what job did you do?

JP I worked at the pithead. It was my job, when the hutches came out of Duddingston, pulled by a long chain, we used to take the chain off, let the hutch on, stop, grade and weight it, tipped up into the big wagons for to go to the oil works, that was my job as a boy.

Q. Where was the breaker?

JP At the pithead at Duddingston, it broke the shale into reasonable sized pieces, the loco took it from Duddingston to Winchburgh. The same from Tottly and Whitequarries all the way along. When I went to the Roman Camps, I started down the pit or the mine anyway as a boy and I was putting the hutches on to go up, that was my job. So I started on the drawing, working at the face.

Q. Did you work with a relative?

JP No, I worked with a chap called Jackie Campbell (he is dead now), he was a faceman, I worked with him for about a year, till I had my accident, I was 17 ½.

Q. Can you remember how much you earned as a drawer?

JP Yes, I can tell you, I earned £6.50 p.w. (£6.10/-) 39 years ago, 1944 when I had the accident, 1944 when I joined the army. As I said, if I'm going to get killed, I am going somewhere else.

Q. Was it the only accident you were involved in?

JP Yes, where I worked you never got people really hurt but you did not

get the same type as down the coal, because you have more room to work, more air, cleaner. Mind you had some deaths, you had blow backs of fire as well. We had a chap from Winchburgh he worked down No.35 that's over by the Threemiletown and a fire blew back on him it killed him, his name was Danny Finnigan. You had a few deaths, but not the same as in the coal, because I think there was more safety in the shale then in the coal. Before the mine's closed, the majority of miners wore safety lamps, instead of Carbide lamps. I didn't like Carbide lamps, anyway, because you used to fill the hutch and you would take it out to the main haulage for the pit ponies to pick it up and you had a screen cloth across to cut the air from going all over the place. Well your lamps used to hit the cloth, and you were left in the darkness. With the safety lamp it was different, you were O.K. if you remembered to duck at the back of the hutch, but if you forgot to duck you used to take it out on the pit pony.

Q. Some miners attached the lamps to the pony's harness?

JP That's right, see these ponies, they are human. We had a pony there he was a right thief, you could take your flask, in they days it wasn't a vacuum flask you couldn't afford a vacuum flask, anyway, it was one of these tin ones, your tea was cold but you needed it cold. The pony would go into your pocket, pull the cork out and up with the flask, oh you have no idea what they get up to, they would take your piece out of your pocket as well. I believe they could tell the time. The pit ponies were really wonderful and we used to have competitions, in Linlithgow in June, to see who looked after the best horse, I do not know how much you got for that, it was not very much.

Q. Did you need extra money for grooming your pony.

JP Yes, that was in Duddingston, but quite honestly it was not very much.

Q. Somebody mentioned a 1/-.

JP Yes, that is about all, of course a 1/- was a lot of money then, that could take you winchin for a week. Every so often you used to bring the ponies up, especially in Duddingston and let them graze, you had to cover their eyes until they got used to the light and see when you let them go in that field they used to go daft, they used to enjoy it. They were good days, but mind we did not have much money, I've seen me finishing, especially in night shift at the tip, I used to finish about 4 on a summer's morning and away out poaching for rabbits. The community life in Winchburgh was fantastic, of course there was no television then.

Q. Now you are a great bowler, did you do a lot of bowling when you worked in the mine?

JP Well I was 21 years of age when I got married and decided to start Winchburgh works then, and the bowling green was there, I couldn't afford bowls in these days but the Institute supplied them, I took it up and I liked it. It was the Scottish Oils that started a lot of bowlers away in the whole of the West Lothian area. I used to pay 2d a week for the green and the Scottish Oils again they supplied the Green keeper and the stuff to look after the green, as I say it was a great company.

Q. You had an Institute didn't you.

JP Yes, we did, but we have not of an Institute any more in Winchburgh, the County Council took that over.

Q. In fact the County Council took most of the Institute away.

JP Yes, we used to have billiards, snooker and everything in it.

Q. Did you play quoits?

JP Yes, but I wasn't very good at that. There was a family called Bishop, Bob Bishop and his brothers and father, they were brilliant at it, also Bob Bishop was a brilliant bowler as well, but that (quoits) was a great game, but I could not get the hang of it, you used to bet money. Winchburgh has now deteriorated, the mining community has slowly died off, I would like you to meet some of these old miners. You used to pay 2/6d a week rent for the house.

Q. how much of old Winchburgh is left?

JP The old rows are left, but most of them are private houses but the old rows are still there, the majority of Winchburgh is still there, you can see it quite plain.

Q. Have the houses altered much inside?

JP No, there is some of them in the single ends have one bedroom and the other houses there were two bedrooms.

Q. They used to have lots of three's, the two outer houses had one bedroom and the centre one had two bedrooms.

JP There is longer than that in Winchburgh, there must have been about 6 or

8 houses in a block. because let's face it we were paying rent of 2/6 - 5/- a week that was a big house. When the Winchburgh works closed down we got a chance of buying our house for £250, a lot of people did it and a lot of people made a mistake, now these houses, believe me are worth in the region of £11,000 - just turn back to the 1950's, rent 5/- a week. The wages were not that big. I used to go to tips and get old tyres and everything to burn, in the old boiler to do the washing in - we couldn't afford, the coal.....

Q. Then you would use the water from the boiler to give yourself a wash.

JP That's right you used to sit in the boiler. We were happy though, we used to go for a walk in the summer, you didn't have any money and you could not go out drinking the way people do in the modern days, we were happy.

Q. What was the situation in Winchburgh regarding drink, because I know Mr. Crichton he was very much against it, almost like a Rechobite, what was the situation like in Winchburgh?

JP Well in Winchburgh there was the two places, the Tally-Ho Hotel and what we termed in these days as Woodcocks. Then the British Legion was built which made it three and the bowling green, they have a beautiful place up there now, that was after Crichton's day. I don't think that Crichton was very well liked, because really he was a strict, strict man.

Q. He is the one who introduced the rule 'No smoking in the Mines'.

JP It didn't work, but if you were in a bad place then you definitely didn't smoke but in the majority of the mines if you got a clear area, yes you did

smoke. Mind it was hard but I would go back to these days to be honest, because as I say you were a Community and if you wanted some sugar you came and chapped on the door and you got some sugar, we were all definitely a community, although we did not have any money.

Q. Did you keep in touch with old miners?

JP Yes, because we all belong the bowling green and if you sit over there in the summer time and just listen, they go back 40 or 50 years they go back and they are really good to listen to. Some of the stories make your hair stand on end, they are really good to listen to what they used to get up to in these days. That old Bob Bishop used to go round catching the rats and putting them down his shirt, he wasn't frightened of anything, just for a bit of fun.

Q. Now to talk about rats, some miners say that the mines were infested with them and fleas.

JP It all depends where you were down to, the miners are right in a way, some were infested with rats or mice but I never ever had any trouble with fleas. The only place we had trouble with fleas was in the baths, you used to take your working clothes off and put your other clothes on and before you got home you were scratching all over, it was the heat that attracted them. The rats, mind you a rat was a miner's friend as well, it is a hard thing to explain but a rat can tell a disaster or fall. Now if you are walking to what we called our place and you saw rats coming towards you, there was trouble, my dad said that. My grandfather died when he was about 30 and he had reason to believe that he left his piece in his pocket, a rat had got it and he ate it and blood poisoning set in and in these days medicine was away behind, and he died.

Q. Did nobody even try to exterminate the rats?

JP No it was impossible, the miners killed them every time they got a chance with a shovel or anything else. You couldn't exterminate the rats because that means leaving poison down. Now if you leave poison down then you have pit ponies down there, and they could pick it up just as easy and as I say I didn't think of a rat as an enemy, mind I killed them just the same as anybody else, but if you see a hoard of rats or a dozen coming towards you, you knew there was trouble somewhere, or there was going to be trouble. I believe, and many an old miner will tell you, and a matter of fact if they want to tell the truth they used to feed the rats, leave their crust down and they used to get a row off the fireman for that, for the firemen were the gaffers down the pit. As a matter of fact we had a pet once that only had three legs and we used to feed it but all the old firemen in these days walked about with a safety lamp and a walking stick with a steel tip, to test the roof, and one day we were feeding the rat and he just came in 'whang' over it's head and I said to him 'what did you do that for?' and he said 'I'll show you, the leg of the rat which was cut off was infected with gangrene which could have caused yourself a lot of trouble. I think that a lot of old miners will class rats not as an enemy, I didn't anyway, they never did me any damage I think they did more help than harm. Some places you would get a lot of mice, but there were more rats, but they never did any damage, you just had to watch your piece.

Q. How do you think that they came to be in the mine in the first place, would it be when you opened up the mine in the first place, and they worked their way down?

JP Yes, that's right, they could ride anywhere even in the hutch going down and a cage going down. Once two get down there male and female that is all you need, because they breed three or four times a year.

Q. Once you are finished in the mine everything is blocked up and filled with debris.

JP Well the majority of rats are down there to die, because it doesn't matter what pit or mine you are working in there is always a pump there to pump the water out, but once the pump stopped the water level rises, so that cleaned them out. It is the same in all these areas, West Calder, Winchburgh, Tottlywells they are still sinking yet, the ground's still sagging.

Q. When you were in Duddingston did you have 100% extraction?

JP In Duddingston I worked in the pithead.

Q. What about the Roman Camp was that 'stoop and room', or long wall?

JP What do you mean by that?

Q. Well, you know in the stoop and room you drive you levels then you drive your "upset" then you are left with a square about 200 feet and then you cut it into slices and then you extract it.

JP I see what you are getting at, you are talking about places, I would walk in with you so far, you would go to the right and I go to the left but we all met on the main road, maybe some places that were tried and the shale was bad we called an end, a dead end. You all walked on the main road until

you got to your own place and then branched off but you all met again, you had all your own places. As I say it was different, actually when your in the coal and you used to pack the sides back in again, but you don't do that in the shale, because you don't have to.

Q. Where did you get your tools from, the snibbles, picks and shovels?

JP Well the snibble was supplied by the company, but the shovel, pick and your mash you had to buy, the faceman bought them, sometimes the company supplied them, but the faceman paid for them, or if he could buy them elsewhere cheaper. It was his place, because he got a bigger wage than the drawer did and he paid for the tools, he was the contractor, but as far as the drill was concerned the company paid for them and the snibbles. It used to be great at the snibbling, one in each hand and many a skint finger I got when I was learning it used to catch on the ground. But once you got used to it it was fantastic, I have seen me when you snibble, you set your snibbles out so far, maybe when a rake of hutches are coming out.

Q. A rake was it four or six hutches?

JP It all depends on the gradient, it could be four, six or eight, well you got the first two snibbles and once you know the job you throw them into the first one, let one go throw them in and you keep on running up until you get them in. It is just a matter of timing and getting the knack of it, but many a skint finger and broken nail and everything, but they healed so you did not bother much.

Q. Now in the Roman Camp was it endless haulage you had for the hutches?

JP Yes it was.

Q. Did you ever work on that where you threw the chain on it, and that was once and you pull it twice and you pull it into a banana, you had a coupling and then the banana, did you work on that?

JP Now that wasn't the Roman Camps that was Duddingston. Now the chain, the hutch used to come up, stop, and then went off to the pithead, you took your foot from the chain and the hutch ran forward a wee bit quicker, you bent down and lifted the garbie and you gave it a flick of your wrist like that and that knocked off the top of the banana, as you are calling it, it used to unwind, you used to give it a flick with your left hand at the back and then flick it forward, now this you putting it from the full side to the empty side, now you landed that in a space like that in between the rails and as I say you flicked it over and then you flick it again and then you just do that with your hand and it went like a snake. You've got a chap there on the other side who puts the garbie in burls the chain round three times and puts it in the banana as you call it. Then when the chain, when the hutch went down the slope the chain tightened, and that was it, away down the pit. I do not know where you got the word banana, but that just sums it up, we called it a garbie.

Q. It is the same as you have the different couplings between the hutches you had the ram coupling, the pudding coupling and the plain coupling.

JP That is right, and you used to make sure that there was none of them stretched, if they were stretched they were no good, they could have caused someones death.

Q. If the coupling was stretched and the horse stopped dead it could un-couple the coupling and the hutch would run away.

JP That is right you would get some of the really smart pit ponies they know when to stop and step aside, a good ostler did not even have to talk to his ponies, he knew because when you are coming out you are sitting on the first hutch anyway, strictly against the rules, but there was no management.

Transcript

J. Paterson

Industrial  
Information

I started in the pits in 1957, where I started on the ponies.

We had a pony in Duddingston who was just like a human. He used to take the pieces out your pocket and eat them. He also used to take my flask and take the top off and then my tea was cold when I wanted it.

Every so often you used to bring the ponies up, especially in Duddingston and let them graze.

You had to cover their eyes until they got used to the light of day. When they were allowed to run in the field they used to go mad enjoying it.

Grooming The Ponies

When I was in Duddingston I used to get an extra one shilling for doing this.

Roman Camps

I then moved to Roman Camps where I started on the retorts, then I moved to the tip.

The Tip

The rails at the tip were white pot and we used to have an old cap on and an old piece of duster tucked in so you bent forward and you lifted the hutches at the same tip so that the stuff went down the tip.

Hutches

We had two types of hutches, one that you tipped straight up and over. The other type were tipped sideways and went over.

Chain

At Duddingston there was a chain on which the hutches used to come up and stop. Then they went off to the pit head. You took your foot from the chain and the hutch ran forward a wee bit quicker. You bent down and lifted out the garble and gave it a flick with your wrist and knocked off the top of the banana. It then used to unwind and you used to give it a flick with your left hand. This is you putting it from the full side to the empty side. There was a chap on the other side who puts the garble in, burls the chain round three times and puts it in the banana as you call it. Then when the hutch went down the slope the chain tightened and that was it away down the pit. I don't know where you got the word banana.

Hutch Coupling

It was the same as the different couplings between the hutches. You had to make sure that none of them stretched or they could cause someone's death. If

the coupling was stretched and the horse stopped dead, it could uncouple the coupling and the hutch would run away.

#### Retorts

I came back off the tips onto the retorts where I was learning to be a foreman. It was very interesting on the retorts because you had to watch the timing of the shale going from A to B. There was a small hole that you could look through to see if the shale was burning steadily, so that all the oil was taken out of the shale. This was when it was dull red in colour. If it turned white hot you were in trouble, because that meant that the shale was sticking or getting hung up between A and B.

#### Gases

To stop the gases going through you had a valve on the top of the benches that you put down to cut off all the gas coming out of the bench. We had then to go below ground level where three or four of us took a small metal plate off so you could actually see where the shale was getting hung up and this was why it was not working properly.

#### Rods

There were four or five long steel rods that were bent in the middle. We used to find the length of rod we required and move it back and forward up through this hole until

the shale came away.

Once we got it working again what we did was, the parts that were sticking there was this arm with a key and we used to turn it round quickly until all the shale that was sticking was out on the belt and when the green shale started to come out it was O.K.

Shale

I then had to go to the top of the retort and refill it with shale again.

Squads for Retorts

We had men up on top of the retorts and it was their job to fill the retorts. There was four half retorts, which were Nos.1, 2, 5 and 4 which had to be filled as well.

We had to check that all the shale was going through these evenly when they came under the belt.

There were men working on the big wheel, who opened it with their foot and the shale came out so that you could see the colour of it.

Naptha

It went from there to what we called the Naphtha plant. This plant produced Naphtha, Paraffin Oil, Soap and all these different things that came from oil.

War

When the war started a land mine was dropped right in the centre of the Winchburgh Works and it split one of the big chimneys, and also blew all the windows out the

houses in Winchburgh. The bombs never touched the works and they never lost an hour's work.

We believe that the Germans knew where the Winchburgh Works were and they were out to get it, but they missed.

Westwood

In 1959 they devised new automatic retorts, which I think was a wee bit late and was a big mistake because of Winchburgh being still in production.

Winchburgh

Winchburgh had eight benches, four in each half, making sixteen retorts altogether.

Half of these were stickers and this was their downfall.

They tried to repair them when the brickwork fell down due to poor workmanship.

The actual workmen knew their job but when you get more than half the retorts up the harder it was to get them going again, so they were just out of commission.

Broxburn

When they really needed all the oil, they could have done with Broxburn. This was also the time they had all the trouble with Winchburgh. This was because they were taxed and the amount of work it would take to get it working again.

Safety Lamps

Before the mines closed the majority of

miners wore safety lamps instead of carbide lamps. I didn't like the carbide lamps because when you used to fill the hutch and take it to the main haulage for the pit ponies to pick up. There was a screen cloth across to cut the air from going all over the place and our lamps used to hit the cloth and you were left in darkness. With safety lamps it was different, and if you remembered to duck at the back of the hutch, but if you forgot, it used to catch. Some miners used to attach their lamps to the ponies harness.

Wages

I can tell you I earned 6/10/- a week thirty nine years ago.

Accidents

Where I worked you never really got hurt. Mind you we had some deaths. We had a chap from Winchburgh who worked down No. 55 pit by Threemiletown who was killed in an underground fire.

I think there was more safety in the shale mines than the coal mines.

Rats, Mice and Fleas

It all depended on where you were down the mine. Some were infested with rats and mice. I never had any trouble with fleas. You used to take your clothes off and put your other clothes on before you got home and you were scratching all over. It was the

heat that attracted them.

Rats were the miners best friend as well.

It was a hard thing to explain but rats could tell when a disaster or a fall was about to occur. If you saw rats coming towards you there was trouble, that's what my father used to say.

The miners killed the rats every time they got a chance with a shovel or anything else. You couldn't exterminate the rats because that meant leaving poison down as it would have harmed the pit ponies.

I can show you the leg of a rat that was infested with gangrene which could have caused the miners a lot of trouble.

Closure of  
The Shale Mines

When the shale mines closed, so many of the miners went to B.M.C, but it wasn't the same because some of the men had been down the pits for thirty or forty years and it was the only thing that they knew. Can you imagine a miner that has been down the the pit for thirty or forty years going into a factory.

Domestic Life  
Marriage

I was twenty one years of age when I got married.

Housing

The housing consisted of single ends which had one bedroom. In Winchburgh there must

have been about six to eight houses in a block.

Rent In the 1950s the rent was five shillings a week.

Boiler We used to get water from the boiler to give yourself a wash. We also used to sit in the boiler as well.

Social Life We did not have an Institute in Winchburgh.

Institute The community council took that over.

Bowls I couldn't afford bowls in those days, but the Institute supplied them. It was the Scottish Oils that started a lot of bowlers in the West Lothian area. I used to pay 2d. a week for the green and Scottish Oils supplied the greenkeeper and the stuff to look after the greens.

Golf Lord Hopetoun granted permission to build a golf course on his land.

Poaching Rabbits I used to finish about four o'clock in the summer mornings and I used to go and poach rabbits.

Billiards and Snooker There used to be a billiards/Snooker room in the Institute Hall in Winchburgh.

Quoits We also used to play quoits in the Institute Hall in Winchburgh.

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