

MG SIDE ONE

A. I was born at Redraig in 1913, and my father was the joiner at Oakbank at the time. Then he got the job at Westwood and we moved to Oakbank Cottages at Westwood, where he took up the job as joiner at the pit. I went to the school at Gavieside till I was qualified and then I went to Redhouse. When I finished there I went to see the under-manager who was Tom Brown and asked for a job which he gave me.

Q. This was at Westwood?

A. This was at Westwood! I was employed at the pit bottom taking the empty hutches off the cages, and putting them on a creeper to take them up an incline, to be distributed to the different sections in the mine, or the pit.

Q. And what age were you then?

A. Fourteen.

Q. Who was the manager at that time?

A. Mr. Easton was the manager, and he was in charge of the two pits at that time, he was in charge of Breich Pit and Westwood. I don't know if that's of any interest or not, but he was a bit of a rough type of man. I worked on the pit bottom for about six months and then I was given a job down what we call Gochan's Dook, which was a place that my brother worked in, on an endless haulage, and I was given the job of looking after the bottom of the endless haulage, plus what we called a cousy brae, which is an incline, it's worked by a back-balance hutch, the full hutches pull the back balance up, and the back balance pulled the empties up, and me, I had to look after both of these.

Q. And did you know of any accidents or anything like that, when you were doing that job?

A. Oh yes, I had a brother killed, who was Bertie Graham, or Herbert Graham, I had one crushed between hutches, Robert Graham, and he was crushed between hutches at the bottom of a haulage, and then I had another brother lost an eye at No.26.Mine in an explosion and Jock, another brother, he was injured by a runaway pony down the pit, and got his leg badly torn.

Q. What pit was that?

A. That was at Breich Pit. The pony ran away with him. By that time I had had enough of the mines, and there was a job going on the hutch repairing with an old gentleman by the name of Sandy Campbell in East Calder. You might know Sandy, he wrote a book of poems which was published after his death, which is very interesting and Sandy and I worked there for about six months and then I got a job in the pithead taking the full hutches off the cages, where you had to steady them over the weighbridge and take the tokens off the hutch to let the people know who the hutch belonged to and then the hutches were sent on to the tumbler and loaded into wagons for despatch to Oakbank at that time, and Addiewell.

Q. When your brother was killed, what really happened? Did you know what caused the accident?

A. They were putting a tree up to support the roof, and he turned round to get the mallet to drive it in, and the tree slipped and struck him on the head, and he never recovered.

Q. That's when you were working at Westwood. The other accident with the crushing of the hutches, how did that happen?

A. Well, I really can't remember exactly how it happened, but I

think it was at the bottom of one of the endless haulages and the hutchies had run away and he happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was badly crushed and got his pelvis broken and punctured his bladder and he suffered for years. He had to attend Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Q. Did they diagnose that right away? Who was the doctor at that time?

A. Doctor Young from West Calder was the doctor at that time. He didn't diagnose it, he said it was the gravel and I should treat it with iodine, rub iodine into it, and it was after a bit that he couldn't pass water and that, that was when he was sent to the Infirmary for X-rays and they found that his pelvis was broken and his bladder was punctured and that was the cause of all the pain that he had, so he had to carry on for years attending Edinburgh Royal for treatment.

Q. And the one that lost the eye.....your brother who lost the eye. Where was he working about?

A. My brother Jim, he was working at Twenty six Mine up at Polbeth, or was near Polbeth, and he went into what we call the hangfire, which was shots that hadn't gone off at the right time, and he went back in to investigate and Matty Gordon and him were injured in that, he lost an eye, and his hearing was damaged and things like that. He was at that time studying for an Under-Mine-Managers Certificate at Heriot-Watt, and he had to give that up, owing to his injuries. His compensation wasn't very much, I can't remember the exact figure but it wasn't much. So he departed and went to Canada and he's been there ever since.

Q. And Matty Gordon, the man that he was with, what happened to him?

A. He lost the small finger of his right hand, if I remember rightly, I don't think that Matty received any compensation whatsoever.

They said he was still fit for work.

Q. When you were doing the hutch repairing job, what was involved in repairing the hutches and what had you to do with the hutches?

A. These were metal hutches which often got involved in crashes down the pit, and they got either their axles bent or the hutch was badly bashed about and Sandy Campbell, who was a great character, he was a blacksmith to his trade, I think, and he used to get them on the plates, and light fires underneath the buckled parts and wait till they heated up, and knock them out with heavy hammers, straighten them up and rivet or weld them and put them back into working condition.

Q. Had you a special workshop for taking them out to.....for repair?

A. Yes, we had a special workshop in the side of what we called the bing, it was half way up it, and the hutches used to come down for repair, used to be pushed into a siding there, and we used to collect them and repair them.

Q. Did you have wheels, new wheels, or replacement wheels?

A. We had replacement wheels for them and.....

Q. And axles?

A. And axles, and we cannabalised quite a number of.....some that were beyond repair, we cannabalised parts of them for repair of the hutches. It was a great job.

Q. How long were you in that job?

A. For about six months.

Q. And what other work did you do after that or during that period?

A. Well, I went from there to the pithead, this was a job taking full hutches off the cages when they came up, and steadying them over a weighbridge, where there was a man weighed them and also there was another man there checked the weights for the miners, he was called the checkweighman for the miners and each hutch had a token on it, representing the man that hutch belonged to, and this was handed in and the weight put against them for payments.

Q. Can you remember how much you were earning a week?

A. Oh, about thirty shillings if I remember rightly.

Q. And what age would you be?

A. Oh, about.....when I was working on the pithead. I was about seventeen by that time, about seventeen. The pit closed down for repairs to what we called the lightening dook haulage and that's when I left the pits. I left it then.

Q. You left it altogether, you left the Scottish Oils?

A. I left the Scottish Oils, and I joined the Army. That was my stint on the Scottish Oils.

Q. When you were down the pit, can you remember much about the conditions that you had to work under?

A. The conditions were very good actually, but it was very lonely. The place where I worked in down Gochan's Dook, I only saw, during the whole time of your eight shifts that you were working, I only saw a pony which was sent in by itself, for pulling empty hutches, and I uncoupled them, turned him round, and coupled them up to the full hutches and that was all I saw in these days, except on the nightshift, there used to be a man by the name of William "Canty" Murdoch, who we called the

"cleek-hunter". He came from Oakbank, he originally belonged to Oakbank, and he was a great man.....Burn's man for a' that. Probably you have heard about him, that "Canty" was a "cleek-hunter" and he used to come round once a night, more or less, to see that everything was alright.

Q. When the pony.....you said there was no pony driver with.....?

A. No, the pony used to come in by itself. The pony driver had to work another endless haulage, further out the road, but he sent the pony in this last bit itself, and it used to come in through with the empty hutches and it knew where to go and knew where to stop, and I uncoupled it and then I turned it round and coupled it on to the full hutches and it used to dawdle away with them.

Q. Where were these ponies stabled then?

A. They were stabled on the pit bottom. The stable was spotless, really first class conditions and these ponies were like humans, they were knowledgeable. I remember the name of that horse, that pony, he was called Star, he was a grey pony, he was called Star, I remember that.

Q. And were you inclined to waste them with little titbits and things like that?

A. No, no.

Q. No?

A. No, you didn't give them any titbits. They were well fed and well kept!

Q. Can you remember anything about any characters who were working at Westwood at that time?

A. Oh well, Johnny Reynold's father was the nightshift under-manager and he was a very nice old gentleman, he never spoke to you in a

rough manner or anything like that, and his sidekick was "Canty" Murdoch, better known as "Canty" Young, under his running name. "Canty was a bit of a character, as a lot of people knew, and he might come to the road where you were working, and he would have no light in his lamp, and he would have no carbide for it, and he would beg a fill of carbide, to let him see his way around. But "Canty" had all his wits about him as regards Burn's poems and Burn's Suppers and one thing and another. In fact he had a great poem about the "Toast to the Lasses", which was often recited in these days. There was another character who worked in the labouring at Westwood, Dickie Preston, and Dickie was pretty nearly blind!

Q. Where did he come from?

A. Mid Calder. That's some of the..... there were a lot of characters.

Q. What was his job?

A. Dickie was a labourer, on the surface. He used to smoke a pipe upside down to keep the rain out of it.

Q. Was that a clay pipe?

A. A clay pipe, and it was a nose warmer, it was broken off. But, there were lots of characters at the pit, that you.....

Q. See "Canty" Young, when we spoke earlier about "Canty" Young, he had a little dodge, when he wanted some carbide. What was that about?

A. Well, he used to come in the..... this road where I was working and you were only yourself and he would crawl in there in the dark, and he used to take the bottom of his carbide lamp, and spit in it, put it back on and try and light it and he would say it wouldn't light. That was his idea of getting a fill of carbide.

Q. So there was no carbide in the lamp to start with?

- A. No, not really. There was nothing in it.
- Q. Did you give him some carbide?
- A. Oh yes, you gave him some to get rid of him.
- Q. Can you go back to when you started work? What were your housing conditions like?
- A. Well, actually, the house at Oakbank Cottages was very good. The... we had two bedrooms and a living room and kitchenette, known as the scullery, and in the scullery you had a big boiler which was fired up every Monday for washday. The steam off that.....you used to have to open all the doors and windows to let the steam out, or the walls used to run with dampness.
- Q. Condensation?
- A. Condensation, but we had a big family, we had thirteen in the family to begin with, but I lost a young sister when she was a baby, and that left twelve of us, and my father made a.....there used to be two built-in beds in the living room, and my father being a joiner, he made a hurly bed which was a bed that was on wheels and you pushed it under the built-in bed during the day, and was drawn out at night for two to sleep in, which was very comfortable then, I must say.
- Q. I believe that type of bed's coming back now, you would have saved something.
- A. Well, I hear that this bed's coming back in fashion, that it's like a single bed, with a hurly bed that pushes underneath it, to give you another single bed. I know a friend who's got one, and she just bought it recently, but I don't think it would be as good as the one that my father made.
- Q. No doubt. Because bunk beds became fashionable, so this type of

bed would take the place of a bunk bed.

A. A bunk bed, and it's not as high and dangerous. The top bunk bed..... it's pretty dangerous for the kiddy to be in, whereas this bed was just the same height as the.....actually lower than the single bed.

Q. Had you any hobbies or pastimes that you liked doing in these days?

A. Well, there was nothing at Westwood. There were only fourteen houses, there at Westwood. You made your own entertainment. Sometimes we went over to the village at Breich where they had a dance hall there and we used to go to the dances. In the Breich Hall, which was two houses knocked into a Hall.

Q. Was that a Hall converted by the Company?

A. It was converted by the Company. There was no electric light in these days, it was paraffin lamps on the wall, round about it, and the local band was the Nichols from Breich who provided the music. Matt Nichol.....

Q. And what instruments did they play?

A. Matt Nichol played the dulcimer, I don't know if you know what a dulcimer is, but Matt played the dulcimer, and one of his brothers his half brother played the drums, and one of his other brothers played the accordion, and we had some cheery nights there.

Q. So it was old time dancing?

A. Old time dancing, yes.

Q. When did you leave Westwood?

- A. I left when the pit closed down for renovations to one of their main haulages down the lightening dook and we were all put on the dole, but dole didn't suit me anyway. I went to work on a farm through by Glasgow.....Millerston. During that time I took a notion to join the Army and I joined up in January, 1932, and I was there for six years in the Regular Armed Forces. When I came out I was offered a job in the Prison Service which I took up, and was there for thirty odd years, except during the war, I was called up as a reservist, and was incapacitated in 1943, and was returned unfit for further service. That was my life story. When I retired from the Prison Service, I was offered a job at Pumpherston there, as a sort of general-factotum-message boy.
- Q. That would be B.P. then?
- A. B.P.....it was, but in Young's Paraffin Light & Mineral Oil Co., it was still held there by the old pug that they had, the old diesel engine, and it was Young's Paraffin Light & Mineral Oil Co. that was on it, and I used to drive it as a relief engine driver. I also used to drive the crane and the digger that they had, and a general message boy, or any job that was needed outside. I was also given as a handyman to the joiners which was Davy Newton and Charlie Cameron, I think. I enjoyed my time there, it was like a new lease of life to me, not watching who was at my back, and I retired from there when I was 65.
- Q. Was there any of the old original refinery left, that you would know about?
- A. The only part that was left was the power station and the.....  
When I joined there, the power station was still there and the wax shed was still in operation, but that is all closed down now as far as I know, in fact one of the compressors, the old compressors, that we had in the power station, it went to a museum through at Inverclyde.....  
we loaded it on to a lorry and it was sent through there as a museum piece.....a real old compressor.

Q. Had you any other experiences that you can remember when you were with Scottish Oils, anything that you would like to speak of?

A. There's nothing I can really lay at my hand, you know.

END OF TAPE

Transcript

MG

Industrial

I was born in 1913, and my

Information

father was the joiner at

Oakbank at the time. Then

he got a job at Westwood and

we moved to Oakbank Cottages

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I went to school at Gavieside

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finished there I went to see

the Under-manager, Tom Brown,

and he gave me a job at West-

wood. The manager at West-

wood was Mr. Easton.

Westwood

At Westwood I was employed at

the pit bottom taking the empty

hutches off the cages and putt-

ing them on a creeper to take

them up an incline to be dis-

tributed to different sections  
of the mine or the pit. I  
worked on the pit bottom for  
about six months.

#### Gochan's Dook

Then I was given a job down  
what we call Gochan's Dook,  
which was the place my brother  
worked in. It was an endless  
haulage, and I was given the  
job of looking after the bottom  
of the endless haulage, plus  
what we called a cousy brae,  
which was an incline. It is  
worked by the back balance  
which pulled the empties up,  
and I had to look after both of these.

#### Hutch Repairs

When the hutches needed repairing  
after they had been involved  
in crashes down the pit, I had  
to repair bent axles, or badly  
bashed hutches. Sandy Campbell  
was the blacksmith. If I needed  
him to help with the buckled  
parts he used to get them on  
the paltes, and light fires  
underneath the parts to be  
repaired and wait until they  
heated up, and knock them out  
with heavy hammers then straighten

them up and rivet or weld them  
and put them back into working condition.

#### Special Workshop

We had a special workshop in  
the side of what we called the  
bing. It was half way up the  
bing, and the hutches used to  
come down for repair, and they  
were pushed into a siding, and  
we used to collect them and  
repair them.

#### Axles

We cannibalised quite a number  
of the axles that were beyond  
repair. I was on that job  
for about six months.

#### Pithead

I went from there to the pithead,  
and this was a job taking the  
full hutches off the cages when  
they came up, and steadying  
them over the weighbridge. There  
was a man who weighted the, and  
there was another man who checked  
the weight for the miners, he  
was called the checkweighman  
for the miners. Each hutch had  
a token on it representing the  
man to who the hutch belonged to,  
and this was handed in and the  
weight put against them for

payments.

#### Pit Ponies

The pony driver had to work on another endless haulage further out the road, but he sent the pony in the last bit by itself.

It used to come through with the empty hutches and it knew where to go and where to stop.

I then uncoupled it and turned it round to couple it on to the full hutches and it used to dawie away with them.

#### Stables

The pit ponies were stabled at the pit bottom. They were spotless, and in first class condition. The ponies were like humans, and they were knowledgeable.

#### Ponies Names

I can remember one of the ponies was called 'Star'. You were inclined to waste them with little titbits and things.

#### Carbide Lamps

We had carbide lamps for working in the pit, and this one chap, 'Canty' Young would come down to the road where you were working, and he would have no light in his lamp, and no carbide

to fill it, for to see his way around.

## Accidents

I had a brother, Bertie Graham, who was killed. I had another one who was crushed between hutches at the bottom of the haulage. I had another brother lost an eye in No. 26 Mine in an explosion. Another brother Jock was injured by a runaway pony in Breich Pit. When my other brother was killed, they were putting in a tree to support the roof, and he turned round to get the mallet to drive it in, and the tree slipped and struck him on the head, and he never recovered. The other accident with the crushing of hutches, I can't remember exactly how it happened, but I think it was at the bottom of one of the endless haulages and the hutches ran away and he happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was badly crushed with a broken pelvis and a punctured bladder and he suffered for years. Dr. Young from West Calder didn't

diagnose it right away. He said it was gravel and it should be treated with iodine, but after a while when he couldn't pass water he was sent to the Infirmary for x-rays. It was there they found that his bladder was punctured and that was causing the pain. My brother who lost an eye was working at Twenty Six Mine at Polbeth. He went into what we call the 'hang fire', which was shots that hadn't gone off at the right time and he went back to investigate. He lost an eye and his hearing was damaged, so he left the mines and went to Canada.

Compensation

His compensation wasn't very much. I can't remember the exact figure, but it wasn't much.

Pumpherston

I left the Scottish Oils, and I joined the Army, where I was for six years. When I came out I was offered a job in the Prison Service, which I took up, and I was there

for thirty odd years.

I was then offered a job at Pumpherstons, where I used to drive the old diesel engine as a relief engine driver. I also used to drive the crane and the digger, and be a general message boy. I was also given a job as a handyman to the joiners. I enjoyed my time at Pumpherstons, it was like a new lease of life to me. I retired from there when I was 65.

Domestic Life

Family

We had a big family, there was thirteen in the family to begin with, but I lost my young sister when she was a baby. That left twelve of us.

Housing

The housing at Oakbank Cottages was very good. We had two bedrooms and a living room, a kitchenette, known as the scullery.

Sleeping Arrangements

When I stayed with my mother and father, there was two built in beds in the living room. My father being a joiner made a burly bed that

was on wheels. You pushed it under the built-in bed during the day, and it was drawn out at night for two to sleep in. I hear that these beds are coming back into fashion.

Boiler

In the scullery there was a boiler which was fired up every Monday for washday.

Condensation

When you did the washing there was a lot of condensation and you had to open all the windows and doors to let the steam out, or the walls would run with condensation.

Leisure Activities

You made your own entertainment in those days.

Dances

Sometimes we went over to Breich village where they had a dance hall. This was two houses knocked into a hall. It was converted by the Company. The local band, Nichols from Breich provided the music. Matt Nichol played the dulcimer, and one of his brothers played the drums.

His other brothers played  
the accordian, and we had  
some cheery nights there  
with old time dancing.

Closure of Old Refinery    When the old refinery closed  
down, the old compressors  
that we had in the power  
station went to a museum in  
Inverclyde.

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