

RH

A. There was a mine in Dedridge and it started up in 1910, my father worked in it. It ran until 1919. It was a very wet mine, the water used to break in and in these days the men wore a heavy type of trouser called Moleskins. I remember my father coming home on his bicycle from Dedridge we stayed in East Calder, and his trousers used to stand with the frost, because they were so full of water, and that was the conditions that the men had to work in, in these days.

Q. How deep was the water in Dedridge.

A. Dedridge was a mine not a pit, you could walk down in the morning down this incline, but I do not remember of Dedridge, as I was young then, I am 69 now. I retired about ten years ago.

Q. How old were you when you started working.

A. I started as a boy in Westwood Pit about 16 years of age. Westwood was a pit, 120 fathoms, 720 feet, when you were at the pit bottom, the cages used to go up and down with the hutches full of shale, then there were empties, 2 went up and 2 came down. My first job was at the back of the pit when the cage came down you pulled this draw bar and you took the empty hutches out. The chap on the other side he was the onsetter he put the full hutches on and you took the empties off and you put them up this creeper chain and they went round to this pit bottom and then on to their different districts.

Q. Was that the way that most of the boys started.

A. My brother he is in Edinburgh, he is two years older than me. He showed me my first job.

Q. Did most of your family work in the pit.

A. My older brother left after a month or two, he did not like it, due to his health. My older brother worked in the pit for about 20 years then he left and went to work in Edinburgh. I worked in Westwood pit and I have written down some notes for you, to give you some idea.

Q. What were the two sections.

A. That's what we used to term the Cousie Brae and that was different sections in the pit that got named Walker's Dock and from there the Broxburn section that was another section and it was opened up and turned out to be the richest seam in Westwood.

Q. Was that easier to work, did you make more money.

A. Yes, it was good money there, it was better money there in the Broxburn section, you used to fill your tub to about 22 ½ cwt, that yielded about 46 gallon of oil, that oil was retorted and sent to Pumpherston Refinery. It was then refined and they got bi-products Sulphate of Ammonia and light diesel etc... This section was a nice section to work, maybe you were working about seven feet high which was fine as everything was handy. Up to about one and a half feet up was all dirt, when you blasted that out it had to be all shored along the side, above that was the shale. You drove so far in and then you shored up with crowns, then you had to put up these seven foot (legs).

Q. Was that when you were on the developing?

A. Yes, I was on the developing.

Q. What were you paid, were you paid by distance?

A. You used to get paid by fathomage every six feet. At that time wages were about £5 a week if you were lucky.

Q. When was that?

A. That was about 1930's - 1940's. I was born in 1914 and I started in Westwood when I was about 16, and that was my first job. I did two years apprenticeship with my father, as you were not allowed at the face until you served two years apprenticeship, he was a good miner and worked in the mines all his days.

Q. Did he have his own place?

A. Yes, and he had my brother working with him and I was working with him and a chap from Pumpherston, called McGarvie, he is dead now. I worked with my father and my brother worked with the chap from Pumpherston. So it was

double shifted, if he was on 7 - 3 and then the other shift came on from 3-11 that is how he worked. Then there was a night shift on too, some weeks you were night shift.

- Q. Were they actually working in the Pit, or were they just making things and doing repairs?
- A. No, there were men there just for maintenance, but we were producing the shale.
- Q. Did your father give you extra money because you were family?
- A. My father was good to me right enough, because he had the place and the Company held him responsible for the safety, he got so much extra, for safety of the place, to see that the wood was alright. In the morning before you started there was a chap used to go around about 5 am. he was called a fireman, he went round all the places. There was a chap called Jimmie Scott, from Pumpherson, but he is dead now as well, and there was a chap called Jimmy Duncan, Charlie Crichton (he got killed, he was in inspecting a place one day when the roof came down on top of him). There was also McNally and Graham, they were all firemen that I knew in these days.
- Q. So it was not a job that anybody hung on to for years and years?
- A. Well you see these men had to go to school first and get a certificate to be a fireman. When you went down in the morning, before you went to your place, you used to go to the fireman's cabin and you asked them if everything was alright. When you got started he came round again before 10 am. and had another inspection in your place to see that your wood was alright,
- Q. How did he go about testing it?
- A. They had these wee Davy lamps with them and they used to go up into the waste and test for gas, you could be working away and there could be gas unknown to you and they used to go in with their lamp and test it. During blasting operations you had canvas led into your place, down the middle. Usually the elderly men used to lead in the canvas to you, it was a good wee job for them, they brought in the canvas to bring the air into you.
- Q. So was that the way they got rid of the gas?

A. If they found gas they would pull you out, you could not work in gas, it was bad enough working in the powder reek, because it was quite hard, I developed bronchitis.

Q. Did it take a while to go away?

A. Yes, what we used to do, you used to work in sections and maybe there were four or five men with places just within 40 or 50 yards between one another. Well they made it a point to bore the holes, prime them and about 10 am. when it was about time for your break to drink your tea and eat your piece, they used to let off all the shots then. The strum and you used to have one of these autolight lamps on your head, which used to be carbide lamps at that time. They introduced the electric lamp but they used to have two or three shots lined up and they used to tell the men, we are going to fire and then they went to have their piece, so they all lighted up together and the shots went off. So we went to a small cul-de-sac place where the air was fresh, sat down and had our piece for half an hour, had a smoke.

Q. Were you allowed to smoke?

A. Yes, there were places where you could smoke when you went in and the smoke was nearly clear (from the shots) you used to start and fill your wagons. There used to be a boy with a pony who came in and took your hutches away from you.

Q. That would be young laddies?

A. Yes, young laddies again, about 16 or 17 years old with their ponies came in with the empty hutches and took away the full ones. So that is the sort of working it was and was all just, you see in the big section was what we called the Dunnet section. The Dunnet was higher again, we used 11 feet timber for it, 11 up to 13ft.

Q. What one were you in?

A. I was in the Broxburn and the Dunnet, the Dunnet was down what you call Gaughan's dook and Lightning dock.

Q. How did they get these names?

A. It was just-terms they gave them, the men that was before us when they were developing the thing. It was two men from West Calder, Martin Gaughan and Tony Gaughan, they were down this other place and they called

it Gaughan's dook, and then there is Walkers dook, the man named Walker who used to work down there called it Walker's dook. The places used to take the names from the men who used to work down there. Tony Gaughan was at the West Calder mine up here, there was a damp explosion up there and he got killed. These were notes I took one night when I was reminiscing about my mining- days and thought I would just put it down on paper.

Q. What were the dangerous jobs?

A. Sometimes your shots did not go off, the regulation was that you were supposed to bore (the term boring hole or drilling) well you are supposed to go a foot on the other side from where the original hole was drilled and did not go off, maybe due to a faulty strum that did not connect to the powder at the back. You had to wait an hour before you went back into the place, you informed the fireman and he came and stood beside you while you bore another hole on the other side and you primed it again. Off the record, with the system that was worked, men used to go back in before the hour was up and bore out the hole that did not go off, because it was quicker, but you took your life in your hands, because you did not know if that strum was fizzing and then might run on again, it might stop for a minute and then go on. The result was you would get the shot about you if you went in.

Q. So if that happened then it would be your own fault?

A. Well that is what I am saying, that is why you had to wait an hour, that was the regulation and then inform the fireman in the section that you wanted to see him.

Q. What about the hutches, did they come off the rails quite often?

A. Often, the gauge of the rails was about a foot and you had rails, for handiness about 6 feet and then you had other rails 18 feet. You laid them and you had what we call sleepers, just the same as on a railway. You laid the rail and then put your pick and laid it across and then put your other rail and you just went right up and that is how you got your measurement. If your rail was not laid right you could always move it with your pick just a finger length. You got wise to all these sort of things.

Q. If the hutches came off did they run any distance?

A. The hutches were heavy you used to put a ton in them, depending on how the hutch was filled the smallest of the shale weighed the most. If you were filling a tub with small shale it weighed heavier than big stuff, when you filled it up with small stuff you went round the side with a layer of bigger pieces and then a layer of smaller pieces just for the weight, and you used to go up to the surface and there was a check weighman, a man employed with the Company and then there was a man employed for to work for the men ( A Justiceman) and they sat in this box along with you wagon and they had what they call a pin or token that you used to hang rings on the wagons and you put your token on the ring of the wagon. When it went up to the surface it ran over these weights and the man inside took the weight off you wagon and put down your name, it registered against your pin, my father's pin was 51. It was a wee token, it was just a piece of string and after you pulled your wagon, you put the pin on and put a bit string through it.

Q. Was there water in Westwood?

A. Yes, there was water but they had it all harnessed off, at one time years ago the water broke in, in Westwood at old workings. They got it harnessed back and then they diverted it into another place where it ran off, but Westwood was a day working. In the Broxburn section the water broke in there but the big seam Dunnet and the Walker's it was all dry working. It was an experience and it is a pity that it is not going yet and you could go down and see for yourself.

Q. When you started were they still working the Contractor system?

A. Yes, my father was a Contractor.

Q. Was it just before the war that the system was changed?

A. Yes, just before the war, before 1939 everything was changed.

Q. Would that be much more money for you?

A. Yes, it was what they called an equal divide then, at one time the Contractor employed men (maybe 6 men) well he used to draw the wages and there was a

certain sum that he could pay you, you had a sum that was approved by the Company, what they called the drawer, we were called drawers and the man who had the place he was called a faceman. I could not complain because I was paid quite well, after all I was his son and of course I was not married then I was eighteen years old then and living in the house, at home.

Q. Was it a Scottish Oils house?

A. Yes, a Scottish Oils house in Dedridge, they are still there yet, the rows are still standing. We used to live in No. 4. and then when I did get married I lived in No. 10. It was mainly miners that lived in the houses but nowadays they have been passed on and also new people have moved in.

Q. So what rent were you paying for them?

A. The house that my father and mother were in was very cheap, 6/- or so a week of course wages were much smaller then, and the house that I was in, in Dedridge when I got married, I was only paying about 6/- a week.

Q. What about electricity, did you have that?

A. Before the electricity came in we used old paraffin lamps and when it did come in we did not pay very much for it.

Q. Did you have any other deductions for pay, such as Doctor's fees?

A. That's a laugh, you used to pay 4d for your Doctor, 2d for the Infirmary in Edinburgh, that came off your wages every week before you got them. The union man used to come and you paid something like 6d a week for that. But I always remember that when I started, as a laddie it was 4d for the Doctor and 2d for the Infirmary.

Q. Was everybody in the Union?

A. More or less, and if a man happened to get injured and was laid off it was a standing thing that if you were off 16 weeks you got what was called a

gathering, which meant that every man contributed to much to give you a collection. You maybe got in the region of, well there were a good two or three hundred men and if everybody contributed 1/- or 2/- you got that it helped you till you got better again, but you had to be off 16 weeks before you qualified.

Q. Did you get anything from the Company as well?

A. No, the Company I am afraid did not contribute anything at all.

Q. Did you get compensation for injury?

A. Yes, you did get compensated, if you got your hand cut or fingers and you were not fit to continue you job you reported it to the fireman and he took a report. You got compensation right enough but it was very little you only got £1 or 30/- in old money at that time.

Q. Was the fireman in charge of everybody?

A. Yes, there was an oversman, the under manager but the fireman was the main man for your safety. You always had to see him if you got hurt but that was the kind of system that I remember of.

Q. What did you do when you finished your work?

A. We did not do very much, you used to come to the village here. Mid Calder and play billiards or dominoes in the hall, also cards. My brother and I, after we finished work used to go home and get washed and got our dinner and maybe had a bit of a nap for an hour or so. Then down to the village and leave again by about 9 or 10 pm. Everything used to shut at 9.30 pm. in the village and we had a football team, maybe play football.

Q. Did you ever hear of men being off sick having to be home by a certain time?

A. Yes, if you were in the Friendly Societies if you were off sick you had to be at the house by 8 o'clock at night, because if anybody saw you, or any of

the officials of the society saw you out then you got your benefit stopped.  
That never happened to me, but there were men that were reported about being out late at night and not able to attend their work.

Q. What were the friendly societies about here?

A. Well there was one called the Rechobites the other one was called the Shepherds and the Forresters, I think they are still in vogue yet.

Q. Did you used to give them so much a week?

A. Yes, you paid so much a week or a fortnight and if you happened to fall ill then you got benefit.

Q. Was there any other things that these societies did for you?

A. They could maybe fight a compensation case for you as they had their own lawyers, they would undertake to help you if wanted.

Q. So they did a lot of work that the Union would not do?

A. The Union had a man if you were in any doubt about compensation, Walter Nellies was his name and he used to live in Bathgate. Any problems regarding compensation you went to him and fought your case.

Q. Were you at Westwood when it shut down?

A. No, I left Westwood about 4 or 5 years before it shut down, I was not retired then I went to the Refinery at Pumpherston.

Q. What did you do there?

A. I worked under George Smirrel from Pumpherston. When I went to Pumpherston in 1948 I remember Mr. Anderson he was the manager and I remember he asked me where I came from and I told him Dedridge and he said do you know George Smirrel well you are going to start under him and you will be here to start

at 7.45 in the morning and you will finish at 4.30 p.m. I can always remember him telling me that, he said "I am not a bit interested how you're going to get to your work but you'll be here at that time."

It was Continental Shifts, I've seen me going away at 12.30 on a Saturday afternoon and I was not back until 10 o'clock at night, that was Saturday and Sunday. Every six weeks you got a long weekend off, Saturday to Wednesday.

Q. How many days a week were you there.

A. You did seven days on the trot and then you got two days off and then you started on a different shift. Have you to see George Smirrel yet, a nice bloke that, he will put you in the picture. When the refinery shut down up there I went into the Detergent Plant that was the soap works up at Pumpherston, they are still going get I think. I worked on the filter to see that the soap was clean. I retired from there when I was 62.

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