

WE SIDE ONE

WE Your job is mainly on the pithead, on surface..... they cried it surface work, this is where you actually started. Ninety per cent of miners started on the surface, because that's where your initial training of the hutches, as we cried them, tugs in the coal pits, you were trained there to sort of push hutches, snibble hutches, and literally be the dogsbodies for the men underground, supply them, scraping pit props that came in green, you had to scrape the bark off them, then sort of gauge them. You know, it was a four inch, or a five inch, or a six inch tree, as they were referred to, rather than props.

Q. That's right!

WE And you graded them, and they were obviously different lengths, for the different heights of the working. They could be anything from five foot to seven foot, and you could even get fourteen feet, even, in some cases, but fourteen foot props, they were sort of special, you didn't have a lot of these in stock, but that sort of thing you done, you loaded them in the morning into the bogeys, and that was.....the fireman's job was to write up what he wanted down the pit, you know, for his faceworkers.

Q. And you were sixteen years old when you started that?

WE Aye!

Q. That would be in 1932?

WE No. Sixteen.....Thirty Two, well, you're thrown up. Fifty, the war finished, when.....Forty Nine, No, Forty Eight, Forty Eight, I probably left school. I would say that it would be about 1950 actually!

Q. When you started?

WE Forty Nine, Fifty, that would be the year, that I would start in the mines

really! Thirty Two, right, that's ten plus four, that would be about Forty Eight, so it would be about Forty Nine, Fifty, before I actually started working in the pits.

Q. That was after the war?

WE Aye, well, my dad, he had six years in the Army, he was abroad for these six years.....North African Campaign, 8th Army, he was in, and as I say, there were four of us, three sisters and myself. I mean, any family at that time will tell you, four of a family at that time, was a lot to feed, and to look after, so it was a bit of a struggle for my mum. I was the breadwinner when I was seven, eight years old, sort of thing, when my father went away in Thirty Nine, Nineteen Thirty Nine that was. A shilling a week or something like that, it wasn't really much money for my mother to get. Family allowance or Army allowance, I think it was called then. So you just sort of done what you could, I was the only laddie in the family, so you accepted it, you weren't told you were the breadwinner, but you accepted it as such as you were the only laddie in the house, and alright, you went down to Duddingston, you know, where they had the shale mine, and the.... all the old pit props, broken pit props, all that sort of thing, were dumped in an old.....bit of an opencast at one time, donkey's years ago, and you used to gather up all that out....carry it all up to the house, saw it into logs and that was your firewood, so that saved us a few bob, in buying coal, and if you got desperate, you just went down to the woods, and cut down the trees!

Q. Now, all this happened in No.6.Whitequarries?

WE As I say, all this happened at the end of the war, when I was a kid, but at No.6., the surface training, as I say, mainly was, it was all different jobs, as I say, scraping trees that came in, which turned...they finished they were left to dry for a while, they eventually became the pit props, any goods that were to go down the Mines, such as bricks for building man-holes or stones or things like that, you loaded them into hutches, and they were pushed up to the pithead to get chained on to go down. That was really your training, and then when there was a job became vacant, down the

mine, then you were taken underground, if the under-manager of the pit thought that you were good enough. Obviously the money was down the pit not on the surface! So, you just kept pestering the Manager, the under-manager, to get you a job down the pit, you know. The other way down, was if your father or your uncle or your elder brother or something was at the face, and he would take you down as a drawer. That was the other way to get down the mine. That is how you probably got down the pit, without any training on the surface.

Q. You mean, straight away as a laddie, you could go down the pit?

WE Oh, aye, as long as you had the muscle, and you could fill hutches, because it was a piecework rate, you got paid on the tonnage you returned to the surface. That was how the faceman earned their money, some went on the oncost, because it might have been a difficult bit of the mine to work, they might have been through a bit of stone, which was a fault, and they would agree what rate they would get for driving this, the faceman and the Manager, but that was agreeable, that was a sort of mutually agreed thing..... between the under-manager, the Manager, and the faceman concerned.

Q. When you changed from a pitheadman, where did you go then?

WE Well, that took you underground, from the pithead you went down, you know, down the pit, and my first job down the mine was what they cried "tipping the gavy". This is probably a single hutch pulled up with a single drum electric engine, and you were at the top, there was a man driving the electric engine, and you were at the top, and you uncoupled the hutch, the haulage, which was a steel cable, and you had to..uncouple that, and put it in it's "lie" as they were known, which was, that was a full "lie", then you put on an empty, and shoved the empty back over the brae, and then you let that hutch down to the men that were working. That was my first job, underground!

Q. Can you remember who the Manager was at that time?

WE The Manager was Hector Smith, and he stayed in Uphall. In saying that, I've

an awful funny feeling that Bert Keddie had still something to do with the Whitequarry Mines. Now, Hector Smith, he might have been a sort of under-manager to Keddie at the time, but Keddie.....it was Bert Keddie! But he was the Manager as far as I was concerned! He was the only man that I ever dealt with, at Management level, was Hector Smith!

Q. And after that, what did you do?

WE Well, I progressed, as I say, from what we called "tipping the gavy", to actually driving the engine, because obviously when you are there you learn to drive the engine with the man that was there, which was....old Paddy Glass....was the boys name. He had a bad leg...one leg was stiff, you know, completely stiff, I think it was an accident he had had in the mines, years previous to that, and old Paddy, he taught me how to drive this electric motor around. You got to learn it even at that young age, it was..... just like driving a car, you had a license at seventeen, you learned to drive...well, after all, it's just a case of switching on, and keeping the speed of the engine to the weight that you were hauling up!

Q. And what age would you be then?

WE Eighteen! Seventeen and a half, eighteen...about the age range for that, and as I say, that was a small single drum.....I can't remember the horse power of it, but it was a very small horse-powered thing, it was only one hutch that it would pull up at a time, or maybe two, as I say, it depends on the weight of the hutches that you were handling. Then from that, I moved up to a bigger engine which was at the pit bottom....it was the main engine to the No.6.Pit, and you could draw anything from five hutches in some "lies" which were sharp bends coming on to the main road, as it were, up to ten hutches for the ones that were on a lesser gradient, and they were just hauled up, you hauled them up with the engine, somebody tipped the gavy, they..... they were run round, and then they were fed on to a cage in No.6. because it was a pit rather than a mine. The mine is a lesser gradient, going down into the shale seams itself. No.6 was a pit rather than a mine, because it was cages that....it was a three hutch cage that brought all the stuff to the surface there, and that transported the men as

well. Obviously guard rails were put on to the cage, when they were coming up.....men travelling in them.

Q. Were there ever.....any accidents, or incidents that you can remember when you were doing these jobs?

WE There were incidents happened. My time down the pits, the time I spent, well, I went to First Aid Classes, which gave me, I think a penny a week, extra, because I was in charge of the First Aid box. That was your responsibility to see that there was enough bandages and iodine, phials of iodine, and that sort of thing, nothing spectacular, just humdrum, I suppose I could maybe say it was as simple as that....a pack.....First Aid, very small. But there was enough in it to deal with lesser incidents and accidents that sort of thing. Bandages were the main thing that were used in the mine, because if you did happen to get a cut or were injured, it was dirty! There was always dirt about, so a bandage was the easiest thing to come off on the surface, to let a Doctor or the First Aid man on the surface attend to it. Any other injuries.....

Q. So there were no fatalities or anything?

WE Aye, there was one fatality when I was down the pit! His name was Jimmy Newton, and he got killed at the bottom of Allan's Dock, working, he was a faceworker. His brother Wullie was his drawer, and it was a prop, a pit prop, just shot out with the weight coming on it, and hit him on the side of the head! That was it! Jimmy was unmarked, other than a trickle of blood coming out of his ear!

Q. Did you see him?

WE Aye, I was the First Aid man on the scene when it happened, when Jimmy got killed!

Q. And where did he come from?

WE Winchburgh! He was a Winchburgh man! That was an unfortunate experience in the pit, but you accept these sort of things when you are in the mine, and in the....I still think that you were brought up to it! And there was another bad accident, a Jimmy Tamms from Broxburn, and he was involved in that, wee Jimmy! It was what we cried a step side fault! It just sort of crashed over on to him, and he was badly injured about his head and his arm, and his elbow, and that, and Jimmy was off his work for what, a number of months, really because of that accident, that was a bad accident. The side of his face was sort of hanging on his shoulder, and all you could do was sort of pull it back up into position and wrap bandages around it, till he could get to the surface. Then he was away to Bangour!

Q. So you attended to him?

WE Aye, I attended to him as..well as I say, I took the First Aid course,because I intended to be a fireman! Which later on became known as a deputy, but it was a fireman in these days, and I went for my sub-fireman's certificate. I was in the Rescue Brigade. For the pit as well, which was trained at Heriot's Watt College, in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh. Sort of....you were trained to use breathing apparatus, and you had to be fit, because obviously you maybe had to carry a man, anything up to a mile! Under, very, very severe restrictions especially ventilation. If you were wearing breathing apparatus, it was hard enough to carry that itself, let alone somebody on your back! But that was the.....

Q. Was there much gas in that.....?

WE No, ours was a relatively gas free mine, a lot of workers actually thought that the miners still used the carbide lamp. The carbide lamp was the initial thing and then eventually the Company turned it all round, so that nearly everybody had an electric lamp, a safety lamp. Every fireman, obviously, had to carry a Glenny, a gas detecting device. They had to have one in their place, but they were..they were never..in No.6.Mine they were never locked as such, whereas if it was a gassy mine or..they had to be sort of..pinned and locked on the surface. Because, with the Glenny's that were

issued in No.6.you could actually screw the bottom off and still have..the light would still be naked. Whereas..when they were lit on the surface in a gassy mine, you could run down to the bottom of that, and there would never be a naked light to explode gas!

Q. I see you mentioned pony driving, what was your experience there?

WE Well, pony driving! There was one, there were two pony drivers, in one level, and two in what we cried the other level, and really the pony's job was to haul the hutches in to "lies" as they were referred to, just a sort of a siding, this is what they called it in a railway fashion, but we just cried it "lies" and the ponies hauled the empty hutches in for the men, and hauled the full ones out. That was the ponies.....

Q. Can you remember their names?

WE Hard working, but I can't....."Martin" was one that I drove, that's about the only one that I know, was "Martin" and periodically, we were fortunate in No.6, No.1. was a mine, and as I say, the ponies could be walked upand they got more sort of sunlight than what the ponies out of No.6.got, because you had to attach a different sort of cage to get the pony on to get them to the surface. So, I can only remember, in the ten years that I was down the mine, I can only remember the ponies getting to the surface once, in that ten years! That's to my knowledge like! To my memory! I can't remember them coming up any oftener!

Q. And you also worked as a drawer? Who was it you worked to? Can you remember any names?

WE Harry Ferguson was my faceman! Harry came from Broxburn! A very respected man, he's much a Union minded man! B.B.C. in Broxburn, if you know....the Broxburn Bargain Centre, that's Harry's business! He had taxis when he was down the pit, he was a very enthusiastic member, playing member of the Broxburn Band! Harry was a drawer, but I'm afraid that I wasn't cut out for drawing! They needed too much muscle!

Q. Did you feel that it was a bit hard?

WE It was! Very hard! Anybody that made what we would expect as a reasonable, a reasonable money, I mean, I'm going back to my days, with money, if you made £20 a week, as a drawer, or faceman, you were making damn big money! You really were! That was the...Utopia - a wage of £20 for a drawer and a faceman, you know, that was hard work! There were very, very few made..... made that kind of money when I was in the shale!

Q. Of course, you were paid on tonnage?

WE You were paid on tonnage!

Q. Were you paid by the faceman, was he what you would call a contractor?

WE The faceman was actually the gaffer! He decided what you were worth as a drawer! A lot of them went fifty-fifty, a lot of them didn't! Some of them underpaid their drawers, others as I say, went fifty-fifty, with everything paid for the...the...sometimes they used gunpowder, what they called powder blasting, other times they used gelignite, which was a more convenient form of blasting, in a sense! And the strum, or eventually, as it got towards the latter years, I was in, it was electrical detonation. The miners, they had all that to pay for, that was all taken off their wages at the end of the week, and what was left, as I say, some facemen split fifty-fifty with their drawers, others didn't! It might have been a sixty-forty basis, or maybe even a seventy-thirty basis, if the facemen were greedy, or the drawer was daft enough to accept the lower cut! It was very much so, in having a strong back, and a weak mind, in a lot of cases, but if you were that kind, then you were the one that suffered financially. The faceman, he would know it! Whether to pay what he thought, he would get away with paying it! But for the most part, the facemen were very fair with their drawers, really, overall! They had the responsibility, driving the face the way that it was supposed to be! You had to keep it straight, you could waste a lot of powder, or gelignite if he was a bad faceman, and didn't bore his holes properly, maybe bored them too deep! Or maybe didn't bore them at the proper angles, and therefore

he was spending a lot more than on explosives than what was ..a really good faceman would! I refer back to being strong backed and weak in the mind, it's not that I'm taking anything away from any of the lads that worked down the the pit, you never really got a big education. You just left the school and back, that was it, you started in the mines more or less! Very, very few laddies made these apprenticeships for mechanics, or joiners or such like, that was what we cried the "up" families! Them that maybe had a pound or two, than the real "run of the mill" working class working man! It was as simple as that!

Q. How many faces did that faceman work?

WE He only had the one face!

Q. He had only the one place! How many drawers did he have?

WE Well, if they...they were on the electric drill, then they could have had two drawers, because obviously, with the electric drill, they could drill holes a lot quicker, blast more oftener than a chap with a hand drill. For the most part, as I say, with a hand drill, you usually only had one drawer, if it was an electric drill, sometimes, nearly in every case, they had two. Two drawers!

Q. And he was fair with you as far as.....?

WE They were all fair, but as I say, for the most part, about ninety per cent, eighty five to ninety per cent of the facemen were very fair people. There were one or two that were a bit unscrupulous, and really didn't treat their drawers fairly. But as I say, the eighty five to ninety per cent.... they did, they were very good with their men, with their drawers as.....as such!

Q. Did you find out that any of the miners in....the men working down the mines took unnecessary risks! For instance.....!

WE Oh, there were risks taken all the time, down the pit! You didn't go down the mine without taking a risk! Even going down the mine, you were risking everything! Really I was.....it didn't take much to have an accident. A.. moments thoughtlessness could.... there could be an accident! Minor or..... major, or even a fireman, I mean a deputy, as they were later known in the pits, and still in the coal mines to this day, they were referred to as deputy. He was on pre-shift inspection, which meant that every place in his area was inspected by him for gas and safety, before the miners were actually let down the pit at all. Even from the surface, he had to come back to what we called the pit bottom and phone and say "Right, the men can come!" And we passed his box, and he would say, "Jimmy so and so, Wullie so and so, you'd better get a tree up for support!", because he had too much of a gap between his support and his face that he was working. Different various aspects of safety. It was the fireman or deputy's job to oversee safety in general, in his particular area of the pit. One of them, Anderson, from Queensferry, he actually got gassed! Going up for the inspection! He went up a heading, through the screen cloth, which...the screen cloth is there for the.....to detect the circulation of the fresh air in the pit, and "Biscuit" was his name, that was his nickname, "Biscuit" Anderson and..... he just walked through the screen cloth and he got gassed! So, it was..... organised with another deputy, the other deputy, the other fireman that was down the mine, was Wullie Anderson. It was Wullie Anderson and another couple of volunteers actually followed what they knew would be his route for pre-inspection and they discovered him and managed to get him to the...the surface in time to save his life! That's the kind of risks that you could catch down the pit!

Q. And did he have any after affects from that?

WE Not to my knowledge, no! He was off work for a couple of weeks, and he came back to work again, and he was the deputy there until the pit closed! When No.6.closed..... that was one of the last, No.1, No.6 Pit at Whitequarry, I think that Westwood was the only one that was going other than these three when the actual shale industry wound up, completely! Because eventually.... the shale from Whitequarries was actually lorried, drivers in lorries from

Whitequarries to Westwood for retorting, and that was that! But danger in the pit, there was always danger in the pit! Always!

Q. Were you a member of any Unions when you were.....?

WE I never joined what was accepted as the Shale Miners Union, because I knew that they would never be strong enough. They did try to get me to..... join it a number of times, but I just refused. I think it was a penny or twopence a week to be a member of the Union, but the Union was just a waste of a penny or twopence, whatever it was! There just wasn't any future asas a Manager you know...in being a Union against the Management in the shale industry, because when I was down the pits, it was quite obvious that the shale industry was coming to a halt because of the influx of crude oil from Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf and the general area. It was quite obvious that the Refinery was then going on to Grangemouth, would eventually be the end of the shale mines, because the retort shale was expensive. I still believe that there could have been a lot more done on the retorting side to make it a more productive thing. I think that there was an awful lot of things missed with the days of scientific knowledge. I can think of a man out at Broxburn, who used to.....out of spent shale he could extract a bleach, and he went round the doors in Broxburn selling bleach from the bottle, and he could extract that from the spent shale. I mean, there was bleach there, that was just one commodity that was getting dumped, literally! And as you can see from the bings around here, the mining area in general, the shale mines in general, I think that there could have been a lot more taken out of shale. I don't know, the Americans, they've still got..... opencast shale mining, and mining the shale, so they must be getting the extract.....they must have a different form of extraction, to what we had in West Lothian, when we were shale mining. And they actually tried burning it,.....actually retorting the shale where it lay in the seam, at Tottly-wells. They tried to extract the crude oil, from the shale, down the mine, without actually mining it as such! But it wasn't.....it didn't prove much of a success!

Q. Do you feel that.....if it wasn't a viable concern.....at that time?

WE It wasn't viable in as much as you were having to pump the air, obviously... for oxygen to create a fire, and if you have a flame as such, then you are actually burning it! You're combusting it, whereas, you really need a sort of....a heat that didn't have a flame attached to it, to melt the oil and the shale, and underground this was nigh impossible. It really was! Because as I say, the only way you could keep fire into the pit, was to feed the air, and if you could block it off, the fire died from lack of oxygen. The only other type of combustion that you got in any kind of mine, coal or shale is spontaneous combustion, which is pure and simply, if you look at a pile of dung in a field, you'll see it smokes! The same thing happens, because that is spontaneous combustion, and that's where you get gasses coming off in coal or shale mining, is pure and simply the deterioration.....well, not the deterioration, it's just a break, in fact, that's been going on for millions of years, in coal or shale. It would be almost impossible to extract the oil from the shale underground, really!

Q. Now, did you also do oncost work?

WE Well, oncost work was sort of laying what they cried a set of tongues, or a set of half tongues, into a particular face, that a faceman needed, or you repaired the roads that the diesels and the electric haulage engines were drawing hutches on, or for that matter, that the horses were on, you had to go and replace sleepers. Say there had been a bit of...say a hutch off the road, as it was called, it maybe broke a couple of sleepers. It was your job to....of course...and replace these sleepers, make sure that the gauge was at it's proper gauge, so that the hutches wouldn't run off again. You would maybe try to re-enforce it, and make it a bit stronger, save it from moving, or if there was a danger in any of the roadways, that were travelled, then you could maybe have to build pillars with sleepers, and that sort of thing, and it was really just the everyday running of the mine that was needed. It was like maintenance work, that you would have on any other jobs on the surface. It was a maintenance type job, but you were underground, and that's what we.....cried the oncost. Which meant that you were oncost to the Company!

Q. Exactly!

WE That you weren't paying your way, productive wise, but you were oncost, and I think that's how the name arose, actually! You were actually costing the Company! But the work still had to get done, for safety reasons as I say, and the reasons of getting the hutches to move, without any real restrictions to them. And that was the oncost work!

Q. So, you were ten years with.....?

WE Ten years down the hole as I called it!

Q. Now, did you have any pastimes? Hobbies or anything that you had while you were working?

WE Oh yes, tennis was my pastime, when I was in the mines, as I say! I took up tennis while I was working down the mines, and it was....the end all of be all, here in Winchburgh, because at that time, we could get more people watching a tennis match, a tennis "hat night" on a Wednesday night than what Winchburgh Albion would get on a Saturday for their football match! Well, for an awful lot of families, tennis was brought down to a working man's financial level, was actually what tennis was! It was accepted as a..... snob sport, but it was only because it was an expensive sport, originally, but once the Council built two courts for us, then it was only costing us twopence a game or something like that, twopence for half an hour. Your worst expenditure was your racket.

Q. And who actually built these tennis courts?

WE The tennis courts in Winchburgh were built by the Council, the Winchburgh Kirkliston Council, District Council, in these days. The tennis court at Philpstoun was built by the Scottish Oils, Middleton Hall was built by the Scottish Oils....and that is the only other two tennis courts that I....I can think of. It's the only two tennis courts that I know of that were.... attached to the Scottish Oils, as such, were Philpstoun and Middleton Hall. Everybody had a character! As I say, you had your under-manager, I told

you about Wull, he was a good under-manager, but as I say, Wull.....

Q. What was his second name?

WE Wull Pride! Wull Pride was the under-manager at No.6. and Wull spoke through his nose, and everyone was a "charater" instead of a character, but you had them all diddled then. You had a man that was on the drawing, I mean, that he was built like the side of a house, Big Jim Neath from Philpstoun. I never met a stronger man in my life! He could lift a diesel back on to the rails after it jumped off, and Jim was shy, a backward type of fella. Och, a hell of a nice bloke, but Jim's Saturday night out was, the Pictures at Linlithgow, and when he came out of the pictures, it was three fish suppers that he got. Two went in his pocket and he ate one, and he always walked home from Philpstoun to Linlithgow. He hardly ever used the bus, he used to cycle to his work, because he wouldn't go in the bus, he was that shy! He wouldn't even go in there in the miner's bus, unless it was really wintry roads, and he couldn't get going on his bike, he used to walk from Linlithgow, rather than get public transport. But there again as I say.....

END OF TAPE

WE SIDE TWO

Q. And you were saying.....?

WE There, that's the difference in your characters! There was a drawer, who had his own..... type of character, and as I say, he was the strongest fella that I ever met, he was a shy, shy fella, but Jim would help everybody..... that was there. You had camaraderie down the mine, that I certainly haven't seen in any factory that I've visited! The difference in levels in class, although as I say, you had your under-manager, who would be your middle.... class sort of type bloke, because he had studied a bit harder, probably taken his fireman's ticket first.....and then he went on to under-management. That was getting on in life, that was him, getting on in the world! In

these days. Characters were everywhere in the shale mine. Some, the..... majority of them were good. One or two.....well, they wouldn't.....they had characters for a different reason, a bit of the bully boy type of things, but you had other boys, that, for all the hard life, they had all..... a struggle to get a decent living out of it, a standard of living. They had their own characters. They used to bet the horses and had to pay the bookies' runner, which was illegal anyway, but they had to pay him at the... end of the week out of their wages! When they collected their wages at the paybox every Friday. And then you had other lads that would go to the tossers. It was well known about all the industries, and they had their tossing schools there, and you had different stories coming out of the tossing schools! Like the boy..... that, reputation goes, that he had lost most of his pay at the tossers, and when he went into his wife..... there was only a pound or a couple of pounds left in the pay poke, and his wife..... she turned round and said "What the hell do you expect me to do with that!" He says, "Well, if you don't know what to do with it, I'll away back to the tossers with it!" That's the stories that you got! Name.....I can't put a name to that one, but you had bowling..... the "bools" as they called it. This was the great rivalry in the mining industry because it was the poor man's sport. It didn't cost them very much! You paid a penny one week, twopence the next off your wages, and that lasted you over the winter months, into the community halls, as they would be known as today, but then they were just simply referred to as the reading rooms, or the bowling in the summer and there was great rivalry between the likes of Philpstoun..... and Winchburgh and Middleton Hall, and Uphall Station and Pumpherton! Great rivalry went on and the characters that were in the mines.....it came out in the bowling! I think Winchburgh's best know character as far as I am aware of, was Bob Bishop. Bob was a great bowler, he bowled for the county, I think that he went to Queens Park at some stage of his life, which is..... that is the Utopia of your bowling career, if you got to Queens Park! I mean, you're there, you're fighting for the top dog's seat, and you had them everywhere. They were all good lads! They all helped each other! As I said earlier.....camaraderie was at it's best, you all helped each other, if one boy forgot his piece, you shared yours with him! And you would never think a thing about it! Share your flask of tea with him, or maybe.....

his flask had got broken for some reason or other, or in those days.....you had a tin flask. Vacuum Flasks, you were a bit of a snob, if you had a vacuum flask! But even those got broken, and you would just, you would just share everything round about! It was as simple as that.....you helped, there was always rivalry, but you always helped each other!

Q. So you felt that the community spirit was better then?

WE Och, you could leave your door wide open, or you could go anywhere that you liked, and leave your back door unlocked. Nobody ever.....bothered you! You couldn't do that nowadays! You've got to lock every damn window and everything up! If it moves, nail it down! Tie it down! No, no in these days, you could leave your door in the Rows open, and you were never bothered with anybody! They would rather give it to you, than take it from you, the majority of the folk. That was all in the villages, wee villages.....like the Newton, bigger ones likes of Winchburgh, where they had retorts or Philpstoun, which was quite big....because at one time, they had retorts as well. Bridgend was reasonably small in those days, it's expanded quite a bit now! Broxburn and Uphall, Uphall Station, and that, they had their own dividing lines, parish lines, and you either came from Uphall or Broxburn. If you came from Broxburn, you daren't tell them that you came from Uphall, or vice versa! The same with Uphall Station and Pumpherston, although they literally ran into each other! I mean if he was a Pumpherston man, he was a Pumpherston man, don't call him an Uphall Station man, and as I say again, vice versa! Or you came from East Calder or West Calder or Mid Calder, you were a Calder man, and that was it! And you were proud, you were proud to be know that you came from the Newton! Even to this day, people will say to me....."Do you belong to Winchburgh?", and I'll say, "I stay in Winchburgh, but I'm a Newton man!" I'm quite proud that I was brought up in the wee village of the Newton. I could say out of all the mates that I've had, not one was ever in trouble with the law! Not one! We were mischievous in those days.....but there was no vandalism. We would never have dreamed of breaking anybody's windows or painting their doors or anything the likes of that! Kids of today, their values are just all wrong, I think! We, as parents, we've worked too hard to give them too much, too easy, I think! It all lies

in that nowadays! They will never get the community back to what it was when the mines were going, because, as I say, when you share danger through the day, then you always had something to share at the weekends,..... you watched your local team, you didn't run away supporting anybody else! Winchburgh Boys, it was Winchburgh Albion, Bridgend Boys, it was the Bridgend team.....Linlithgow Boys, it would be Linlithgow! And that was it! And when you met, oh, it could be a "Donnybrook" at times! Bridgend Rovers playing Winchburgh Albion in the Scottish Juvenile Cup! You were liable to get anything in the region of five to six hundred folk standing watching that game, and no seat or stand in sight, and the arguments would go on for weeks after it, about who won and who should have won!.....and they were characters, they were builders, they were just a great community, and the community's gone, gone from the whole damned area in West Lothian. They're not as proud now too.....they'll not stand up, I mean if they were in a crowd of Bridgend Boys, for instance, you wouldn't say.....in these days, if you went to the dancing there was only maybe you from the Newton or maybe you came from Winchburgh, and there was only a couple of you, and maybe about a dozen boys from Bridgend. You didn't say that you came from Winchburgh, you kept your mouth shut. You kept kind of quiet. That was you, you were outnumbered! But you still, you still would have counted as a Winchburgh man, or a Newton man, or a Bridgend man! The characters in those days were great!

Q. Did you ever stay in a Company's house?

WE Aye, when I got married, I got a Company's house, once, I well, I stayed with my mother in law for about four or five months. And it was just a case of, you badgered everybody in sight, that had anything to do with giving you houses in the rows, so you just kept going across to the Pay offices in Winchburgh here, and you just kept telling the Manager there. You just kept on at everybody that you knew! Till you got a house in the rows and that was you!

Q. And what kind of conditions did you have in that house?

WE Oh, they were good conditions! They were well built houses, they still are to this day, yet obviously you had to work on them because, it was fashionable when I got married to paper your ceiling, and before you could get any papering, you had to take all the white off the ceiling for starters. That's what we used to whitewash our ceilings with in the old, old days, and you had to take all that off. So I spent three months actually working the house before me and my wife and kids moved into it! It was as simple as that! It was hard work, but you done it, and there were other boys quite willing to give you a hand. I've often seen us being at the Badminton, or maybe at the joinery course in the local school at night, and you would say "Oh no, the best paper is this way!" Or how to get a joint right, or how to cover up a crooked corner or whatever! You used to swap ideas and hints! You used to make a pound or two going out doing other people's houses, and it was "bl.....y" hard work, I can tell you! You knew the height of the ceilings and the length of the lobbies and all the rest! It was hard graft to do a whole living room out in a rows house! You probably finished up only getting a couple of quid for doing it!

Q. You wouldn't have all the mod cons in these houses?

WE Oh aye, you had hot and cold water and a bathroom with a bath like, and flush toilets and all that, and as I say, when I had them in the rows! But the Company really built reasonably well for their workers, and I mean, even in these days, the rows houses are commanding.....a lot of them are privately owned now, and they command a great re-sale price, because they were a well built house. Built again with characters, people that built them I mean, it was a local brick that was used in the Winchburgh houses, the Dougal Brick. Dougal brick's known all over the world, so houses that were built with Dougal brick were "bl.....y" well built! And that was it! You can't say the same for a lot of the modern bricks, you can see them crumbling after some frost gets in! The Scottish Oils own brick was a terrible brick, it was made of the spent shale! If it wasn't just mixed and done right, or you got too much hard weather, they just started crumbling! It was a good inside brick, certainly not a.....as high standards as the Dougal brick in the Winchburgh Work, Clay Works and Brick Works made for you!

Q. You feel that it couldn't stand up to the weather?

WE Oh, it wasn't a weathering brick! The Scottish Oils brick wasn't a weathering brick at all! The Dougal Brick could stand up to anything!

Q. That was the clay bricks!

WE That was the clay bricks that were made in Winchburgh. They were, I think, that I'm right in saying that they were exported all over the world, and they were certainly exported to Africa and India. I know that for a fact! How much further afield that they got, I don't know, but the Dougal brick, any Winchburgh man, or the majority of the Winchburgh people, older people, especially, they'll just look at a wall, and they will know whether it's Dougal brick or not, if it was built all these years ago! Although the Clay Works and the Brick Works have been closed for a number of years! It closed down at the same time as the shale fields actually! Roughly round about the same time! Maybe a couple of years before it, maybe a couple of years after it! It wasn't much!

END OF TAPE

Transcript

WE

Industrial

I started work on the surface. Ninety per cent of the miners started on the surface, because that's where your initial of the hutches, as er cried them. You were trained on push hutches, snibble hutches, and literally be the dogsbodies for the men underground, supply them, scraping pit props that come in green.

I had to scrape the bark off them, then sort of guage them into four, five or a six inch tree, which they were referred to rather than trees. You graded them into various lengths, for the different height of working. They could be anything from five foot to seven foot, and you could even get fourteen foot props, they were sort of special , and you didn't have a lot in stock. They were loaded onto the bogeys in the morning and it was the fireman's job to write up what he wanted. This was in No. 6, Whitequarries at the war. I also had to load other goods such as bricks for building manholes or stones or things like that on to the hutches, and they were pushed up to the pithead to get chained to go underground. When a job became vacant down the mine, then you were taken underground, if the under-manager of the pit thought

that you were good enough. As long as you had muscle and you could fill hutches.

Piecework It was piecework rate, you got paid on the tonnage you returned to the surface. That was how the facemen earned their money.

Tipping the Gavvy My first job underground was what they called 'Tipping the Gavvy'. This is a single hutch pulled up by a single drum electric engine, and you were at the top, there was a man driving the electric engine, and you were at the top and you uncoupled the hutch, the haulage which was a steel cable and pit it in its 'lie', then you put an empty hutch on and shoved it over the brae, and then you let that hutch down to the men that were working down there.

Driving the Engine I progressed from 'tipping the gavvy' to actually driving the engine. I was taught how to drive this electric motor around. I can't remember the horsepower, but it was very small only one hutch.

Bigger Engine Then from there I moved to a bigger engine at the pit bottom, it was the main engine to No. 6 Pit, and you could draw anything from five hutches in some 'lies', which were sharp bends coming on on to the main road, as it was up to ten hutches for the

ones that were on a lesser gradient. They were run round, and then fed into the cage in No. 6. It was a three hutch cage that brought the stuff to the surface there.

Wages You were paid by the faceman, he was what we called the 'gaffer'. He decided what you were worth as a drawer. A lot of them underpaid their drawers.

Blasting Sometimes they used a gunpowder, what we cried 'powder blasting', other times they used gelignite, which was a more convenient form of blasting, and the strum, or eventually, as it got towards the latter years, it was electrical detonation. The miners had to pay for it, it was taken off their wages at the end of the week. The faceman had the responsibility for driving the face the way it was supposed to be. You had to keep it straight, this was when you could waste a lot of powder, or gelignite if he was a bad faceman, and didn't bore his holes properly, maybe too deep, or maybe they didn't bore them at the proper angles, and therefore he was spending a lot more on explosives than a good faceman was.

Number of A faceman only had one face.
Faces & Drawers If they were on electric drill, then they could have had two

drawers, because with an electric drill they could drill the holes a lot quicker, blast more often than a chap with a hand drill. For most part I would say you would only have one drawer with a hand drill, and if it was electric then you had the two drawers.

Unnecessary Risks There were risks taken all the time down the pit. You didn't go down the mine without taking risks.

Oncast Work I also did oncast work, which was sort of laying what they cried a 'set of tongues' or half a set of tongues', into a particular face, that a face-man needed or you repaired the roads that the diesel and electric haulage engines were drawing hutches on, or for that matter, that the horses were on, you had to go and replace the sleepers and say there was a hutch off the road, as it was called, it maybe broke a couple of sleepers, it was your job to replace them, and make sure that the guage was right, so the hutches wouldn't run off again. You would maybe try to re-enforce it, and make it a bit stronger, and save it from moving, or if there was a danger in any of the roadways, that were travelled, then you could build pillars with sleepers, it was really

everyday running of the mine that was needed like maintenance work. You were actually costing the Company, but the work still had to be done for safety reasons as I say, and to get the hutches to move without any restrictions. That was the oncast work. I was on that job ten years.

Accidents

There was one accident when I was down the pit. His name was Jimmy Newton, and he got killed at the bottom of Alan's Dook, he was a face worker. Is was a pit prop that just shot out with the weight coming on it, and hit him on the side of the head. He was unmarked, other than a trickle of blood coming out his ear. I was the first aid man on the scene when he was killed. There was another bad accident, a Jimmy Tamms, from Broxburn. It was what we called a 'step side' fault. It just sort of crashed over on to him, and he was badly injured about his arm, and his elbow, and that was Jimmy off work for a number of months. The side of his face was sort of hanging on his shoulder, and all you could do was sort of pull it back up into position and wrap bandages around it, until he could get to the surface. Then he was taken to Bangour hospital.

Gas and
Carbide Lamp

Our mine was a relatively gas free mine, a lot of workers actually thought that the miners still used the carbide lamp, but the carbide lamp was the initial thing. Then the Company turned it all round so that nearly everybody had an electric lamp, a safety lamp.

Glenny

Every fireman obviously had to carry a Glenny, a gas detecting device. They had to have one in their place, but they never locked as such, whereas if it was a gassy mine they had to be pinned and locked on the surface. Because with the Glenny's that were issued in No. 6 you could actually screw the bottom off and still have a naked light. Whereas, when they were lit on the surface in a gassy mine, you could run down to the bottom of that, and there would never be a naked light to explode the gas.

Ponies

There were two pony drivers, in one level, and really the pony's job was to haul the hutches in to 'lies' as they were referred to, just a sort of siding, this is what they called it in a railway fashion, but we just cried it 'lies' and the ponies hauled the empty hutches in for the men, and hauled the full ones out.

Union I never joined what was termed as the Shale Miners Union, because I knew that they would never be strong enough. They did try to get me in to the Union a number of times, but I just refused. I think it was a penny or twopence a week to be a member of the Union.

Domestic Life
Housing When I got married, I got a Company house. Before that I stayed with my mother -in-law for about five months. It was just a case of you badgered everybody in sight that had anything to do with giving you a house in the rows.

House Conditions They were good conditions. They were well built houses, and they are still there to this day. You had to work hard on them, and it was fashionable when you got married you would paper the ceiling for starters. We used to whitewash our ceilings in old days, and that had to come off first. I spent three months on the house getting it ready. You used to swap ideas and hints. You used to make a pound or two going out doing other peoples' houses. It was hard work. You knew the height of the ceilings and the length of the lobbies. It was hard graft to do a whole living room out in a row house.

You would end up only getting a couple of quid.

Mod Cons

We had hot and cold water, and a bathroom with a bath. We had a flushing toilet as we... The Company really built reasonably well for their workers.

Community Spirit

You could leave your door wide open, or you could go anywhere that you liked, and leave your back door unlocked.

Social Life
Bowls

Bowls, or 'bools' as they called it. This was the great rivalry in the mining industry because it was the poor mans' sport. You paid a penny one week and twopence the next off your wages and that lasted you over the winter months, into the community halls, as they would be known as today, but then they were simply referred to as reading rooms.

Football Teams

You watched your local football team at the weekend. You didn't run away supporting anybody else. It was Winchburgh Albion, Bridgend Boys or Linlithgow. You were liable to get anything in the region of five to six hundred folk standing watching.

Badminton

I've often seen us being at the Badminton at night.

Joinery Course

We could also attend a joinery course in the local school

at night.

Tennis

Tennis was my pastime when I was in the mines. I took up tennis while I was working down the mines. At that time we could get more people watching a tennis match, or a tennis 'pat night' on Wednesday night than Winchburgh Albion would get on a Saturday for their football match.

Tennis was brought down to a working mans' financial level. I was accepted as a snob sport originally, but once the Council built two courts for us, then it was costing us twopence a game or something like that for a half an hours play. Your worst expenditure was your racket.

Closure of
Shale Mines

I think that Westwood was the only one that was going, other than No. 1, No. 6 Pit at White-quarry when the actual shale industry wound up completely. It was quite obvious the shale industry was coming to a halt because of the influx of crude oil from Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf. It was quite obvious that the refinery was going up at Grangemouth, and this would eventually be the end of the shale mines, because the retort shale was expensive. I still believe a lot more could have been done on the retorting side

to make it a more productive thing.

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