

Shale Oil Study

Interview with Mr. WS on 8th March, 1985.

Born 1906

Address: 14 Grange Road, Broxburn.

WS = WS

SR = Sara Randall

SR Tell me a bit about yourself - you were born in Broxburn?

WS Aye - 1906, I was born in Greendykes Road.

SR Aha, and you've lived here all your life apart from...

WS I'm a native you would call it.

SR Yes, but you've not moved away apart from when you went to work in Newton Grange.

WS Newton Grange ... I was away twice, I was away 26 to the railway job, it was a summer job, the place was being emptied out of people - they'd all gone over to America and all these places.

SR Because of the strike here?

WS Because of the strike aye, and I've friends that went away to Australia, America and Canada, they went away in boatloads in

those days.

SR Did they all come back again or did they all just stay away?

WS Oh a lot of them never came back. I've friends in my age group still over there, some of them are dead. I'd a brother in law went at that time and it cost him £14 I think was his fare to go to New York. He was a miner, he was a trained miner and he got a job in a coal mine in America, then he came back and then my sister went out to America and they stayed there, but they came to New York where they were much better off.

SR But you yourself, you just went to work at Newton Grange?

WS On the Railways I went to Helensburgh as a porter because you could nae get a job for love nor money in those days, and you had to get references and all that before they'd take you in anywhere, and I was there just for the summer and then I came back to Newton Grange and went on the dole at Dalkeith and then I went back to Helensburgh the next season for the summer season. Then I went up to the Head Office and asked if they could give me a job at anything possible and they said "well, we'll take your name", and so just a while after that I got word to say there was a job at Clyde Bank in the engineering department so I got that and I was nae there long till I went up to the Head Office again and asked for a job nearer home, because I was staying away from home in lodgings - 25s a week and my wage was 42s per week.

SR So it was half of it on the lodgings straight off?

WS That's right and you'd your fare going home, you'd nothing.

SR Mmm, so did they find you a job back here?

WS Then I got a job back at Gogar then I shifted up to Ratho, then there was a vacancy at Broxburn and that brought me back to Broxburn again and I was there from.... 1939 the war broke out. I maintain that's where the first bombs ever fell on Broxburn.

SR There were bombs fell on Broxburn?

WS Oh aye the first bombs ever dropped on the mainland at night, that was so they didn't end up getting shot down.

SR Were you still working on the railways then?

WS I was a railway man for 44 years, I'd to go to Bathgate when I was redundant again, there was big redundancy on the railways then, it was hard to keep your job. For the railway to get rid of you, you saved your way as far as you could. I have a friend, I was talking to him yesterday, he was sent to Glenfinnon, that's between Fort William and Mallaig. They sent him up there and he went, but their principle was if it was too far away you would nae go and you just had to go on the dole.

SR Did you start working on the railways as soon as you left school or did you do something else first?

WS No, I worked in an open cast with four brothers. Do you know what

an open cast is, it was a shale open cast.

SR What the Hayscraig?

WS No, there's one at Hayscraig; at Duddingston that's near Newton, the other side of Winchburgh. There was two mines there, that's the mining place as well, the Oakbank Oil Company in Winchburgh. They had two shale mines along there and one was an open cast and there was me and another three brothers and a (good?) brother worked in the open cast. It closed down, it was nae profitable to work it.

SR Were you the only men working there or were there others as well?

WS There were others as well - no' very many - 5 places they had with 5 different lots of men. There was another man next to us, he had himself and his three sons, he worked in the next mine.

SR Were your brothers older than you?

WS Aha.

SR So you just joined them when you left school?

WS Aye, that was my first job, I was only a boy, well I was no' a boy really, I was about 16. You were nae allowed you see because of the Quarry Acts.

SR And how long did you do that for?

WS Two or three years and then it became unworkable as I said. Then my brother went away, one of them went to the (Metropolitan Police?) and one got a job in Newton Grange, the other one got a job on the council - that was him sorted out for ever. Then after that ... my memory goes away every now and again... I came on to the railway in 27, it comes back to that time again. Then I was on the railway for about 44 years, finishing up at Haymarket in Edinburgh.

SR Aha, but you still lived in Broxburn, you commuted to Edinburgh each day?

WS Yes. It was a hard push on my bicycle coming out – against a storm and everything.

SR Was it hard work working in an open cast mine?

WS No I would nae say that. It was ordinary work, your face would be about 40' high and that was all shale. The way they worked it, they did nae blast - they holed it out from the bottom, and the top weight brought it all over and that was my job sometimes to sit on the top and watch this crack opening because my brothers were down below, and I used to put wee stick across and watch it moving.

SR Then you loaded it into hutches?

WS Hutches aye, and then a wee pony came in for it and took the hutches out - maybe six at a time. That went up to the breaker.

SR And that was up at Winchburgh?

WS Duddingston and then it went to Winchburgh Oil Works which was called

Oak Bank Oil Works. I worked in the Oil Work, I was on the train taking the oil out and bringing the empties back in and bringing the coal in to fire that works at that time. And the local people called it the shunt.

SR But you were saying that the working conditions for those who worked in the Oil Works were not good?

WS Aye, just for some of them, they'd get bad jobs inside the stills, the others were all worked well enough. You see there thousands in that (underwork?) it was nae just two or three, and they had all their own engineers and joiners and processors of the oil, and their own chemists all up there. That was one of the bad jobs - in the stills, but they got their paraffin out of the wax, they used to squeeze the wax and get the oil out, that's where they got that. And recently, before it closed, the men had to bath every day and put ointment on themselves every day, and they'd get an exam every month or two.

SR So the managers started looking after the workers quite well?

WS Yes. There was Dr. Scott, he was complimented, he had a cure for this paraffin cancer and he got so much money for it, but he was the toffs doctor - we had two doctors you see, one for the poor people. Dr. Kelso looked after the poor people, have you no' heard of him yet

SR No I've heard of Dr. Scott but not him.

WS Oh Dr. Kelso was the main man. If you had nae money you didn't need to pay him, he was that way. If anybody needed money they used to go to him. They wanted a Pipe Band in Broxburn at that

time and he was the man that gave everything in, all expenses paid, and they wanted a tartan so him being the chief they wanted to know what tartan it would be, and he said it would be the Kelso tartan and that was a new tartan that was made for him.

SR When you say that there was one doctor for the rich and one for the poor - I thought that people who worked at the Oil Works made automatic contributions - they got something docked off their salary...

WS No no, you paid your dues as you went along. Oh aye, it was 5/- or 10/- for professional duties. Kelso was the best man, if anybody wanted a borrow or things like that, he used to give them the money. He was the main doctor in the 1914 war, he used to be up at Bangour when they were coming in, that was the mental hospital but it was turned into a military hospital. He was very lame when he died, he had two sticks. Dr. Kelso lived in one of the oldest houses in the Old town, he was nae married, his landlady died and he went into lodgings across the road with this widow woman and she had only room and kitchen. Have you heard of the hole in the wall yet?

SR No.

WS You need to get all that down on there to understand the lives that they used to lead. I've seen him (Dr. Kelso) getting put to his bed with clothes on, he could nae lift his legs up, my brother used to rub him down - massage you would call it. Dr. Kelso would go about ... he would drive the horse and trap himself (rest of sentence unintelligible).

SR How many of you were there, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

WS Go over and look at that photo - that's a typical family in those days.

SR So there were nine of you, and that was all?

WS That was plenty was it no'?!

SR I just wondered if there were any others that didn't get on the picture.

WS In fact there was, you would call stillborn - there was two like that.
My father came from Ireland.

SR Did he, and your mother?

WS My mother came from Corstorphine. They were married in 1887.

SR Did your father come here to work in the Oil Works?

WS Yes, thousands of them, all these men came and that's what made Broxburn. They all came from mostly Ballymena, 'cos I know a lot of them yet from Ballymena, they were all Irishmen and the Irishmen came from the south. Because that old man told me yesterday that at one time there was rivalry between the Catholics and the Protestant and the men used to go for a fight, they used to go up the road and say "are you a Dan or a Billy", do you know what a "Billy means? Well, a Billy is an Orange man - King William, and then there was a Danny, Danny is a Catholic.

SR And your father was a Catholic?

WS No no, he was the opposite.

[Passing of photographs and comments here. Irrelevant comments not transcribed.]

WS My mother died of a cerebral haemorrhage.

SR Your sister died when she was still a child?

WS No no, she'd a family. Her man was killed on the railways.

SR And you were the second youngest were you?

WS Third, there's only two of us alive now.

SR Aha, and she's younger than you?

WS Aye, by three years. She had a child every two or three years, everybody had that, there was nothing else to do! There was nae entertainment nor nothing.

SR How big was the house in which you all lived?

WS Well that's what I'm coming to now, you'll ken that now - a But and Ben we called them, that's a sitting room and a bedroom. Well, the beds in it were two big beds and what we called the wee bed, the

small bed. There were as many as four slept in the one bed and there was girls and boys in, you were head and tail, you slept feet to feet. That's how they did it then.

SR And your parents had a bed to themselves?

WS They had a bed to themselves and the room to themselves in those days. The rooms were nae as big as this.

SR What did you do at meal times, did you have a chair for everyone to sit down or did you eat in shifts?

WS They all had their own chairs and their own cups. So there was four in a bed and there'd maybe be three in another bed.

SR Were all four of you brothers in the Oil Works?

WS Aha.

SR And was your father working in the Oil Works?

WS Aye, he was the last to leave. He was working at what they called the experimental to do with the torts. There was a wee laboratory where they took samples and the chemist came over with these samples and took them over to the refinery and they could tell what was coming out. And when the Works closed down in 26, they were given the option for tae work on and get a share of the profits when the time came, but they said no, we're going to strike. Well, the Company said if you strike the Works will never open again because

once these retorts, they're big, big, massive things you see, and they will all disintegrate you see and you'll never get them started again, so they didn't go back to work - they backed themselves that way. My father was left because he was on that side at that time, that was 1926.

SR Did he have to work long hours for very little pay in the Oil Works.

WS Aye, do ye want to ken all that? He used to work 8 or 10 hours a day but it was seven days a week for some men. My father had to work 7 days a week because he got more money for the family, and he had to get a day off so what they done, they worked two days to get one day off. They worked what they cried 'a long turn on', instead of coming off at the weekend they'd go on a double shift and start at 6 in the morning and go right on till about 6 at night or maybe a bit longer to let the other man off to get his holiday - that was the long hours they worked there.

SR So you got a holiday once a fortnight?

WS Once a fortnight, aye, you did a long turn on and then a long turn off as they called it.

SR So you didn't see much of your father when you were a kid?

WS No, I could tell you stories about that on the railways too but ... the jokes they used to make about it. That was the men that was on the shifts, the retort men, you see they could nae close down nor nothing, there had to be someone there, but that's how they got their day off. They were nae well paid - the Oil workers then. I'll

show you that book ...

SR I'd like to yes.

WS You got paid on a Saturday, but if the old folk was hard up I used to get a line when I was a youngster and I used to take it up and ask for Mr. Roberts, I mind his name - he had a big long face on him, to ask if he could get paid on a Friday instead of a Saturday. Do you ken how much you got?

SR How much?

WS A gold sovereign, that was all you got.

SR And with that he had to keep all his family?

WS Aye.

SR So what was your childhood like, was it sort of a struggle?

WS No, you never bother, you never thought because in those days you got a pennyworth of cheese, I used to go for a pennyworth of cheese to the wee shop at the top, or a pennyworth of tobacco you used to get, but you put the penny on the scale and you got tobacco according to the penny - that's how you done it then.

SR Did you have enough money to have several sets of clothes and boots or ...

WS No. You only had the one, it was nae even a suit. The boys used to wear short trousers and a knitted jersey and a big white rubber collar.

SR Rubber?

WS White rubber, it was as white as could be - you had to polish it up with soap and water and dry it and get it on for school in the morning, it buttoned with two buttons and sometimes they had shirts on the boys, but they were heavy shirts. The girls just had long frocks down to about here, they had nae much underclothes either, but these boys in the winter time - they put these under things on but they just covered their arms and shoulder - they'd nae back end in 'em or front end in 'em, and wee legs up to here - that was for the cold. But I didnae mind they'd any coats or anything. They'd stockings and heavy boots.

SR Did you have boots in the summer or just in winter?

WS You did nae wear boots at all in the summer time - you went in your bare feet. I've been up the bings in my bare feet.

SR And that was just because you couldn't afford any?

WS Aye, we could nae afford it. You got a Saturday penny if you were lucky. I used to.... sometimes the old women used to take a drink of whisky maybe to break the (wind?) in them and I think it was 5d for a gill and she'd send you down to the shop and you knew the shop to go to. I mind one of their names and it was Kennedy - Murdoch and Kennedy and you'd go to them for your gill of whiskey but he'd give

you a big bag of sweets for nothing for coming to his shop and that's why we all used to go to his shop. The old women used to drink it and it would get their wind up. You see there were no women in pubs in those days and no smoking.

SR So they used to drink at home?

WS Aye, it would nae be much though. Some of them drank, 'cos I went for drink too for the old boy - my father coming home from the retorts. I used to go down for a jug, and you used to get a big jug for a penny or tuppence of beer or ale or whatever it was. You used to get a wee drop yourself for going down.

SR So your father used to drink?

WS Oh aye, he drank all right. I've seen him drunk, they all drunk then - they were fighters.

SR Really?

WS Oh aye, my father could have fought four men! He was one of the (?).

SR Did the fact that your father drank mean that your mother had less money and ...?

WS Oh she'd have less money, but it all worked out, some how or another. There was nae fighting nor nothing. We had arguments sometime. When the boot – this brother & this brother were always wanting to fight one another to see who was the strongest.

SR And when you started work did you start giving all your wage to your mother?

WS Aha, and then it came to.... I had another brother – he lived with us for a while - he went to the drink and he would nae pay and we had to put him out. He died when he was out poor soul, all my brothers died with pneumonia and he died with pneumonia. But I'd seen him that night and he was laughing then, but he was a blue colour, and he was dead in the morning.

SR Aha.

WS This was a hole in wall here before it was all altered you see, the wall came out here and the bed sat in there - that was the hole in the wall. In the big houses - the company's houses, there was a.... it would be about 8 or 10 feet long the bed, but there was no beds in those days - that hole in the wall was a board that went along and there were boards fixed across it and you went to the farmer when he was threshing for a tyke, do you know what a tyke is? It's like a tent thing and you used to get that filled with chaff and that was your bed.

SR Was it comfortable?

WS Well, it was warm! You never thought about anything else, but it was warm - with all those folk lying in the bed - you were hemmed in! Then they invented the straw mattresses. These boards that were in that house - they were scrubbed white every spring and put outside to dry and then they were brought in. The fireside was the same,

that was kind of scoured down and polished up every morning.

SR Aha, by your mother?

WS No, no. Somebody got their chores to do sometimes.

SR Boys and girls or just girls?

WS Boys and girls. Then the living room - that's where the tap was where you got your water and you had your wash in there.

SR Oh you had a tap in the house?

WS Aha, that was in my time we had a tap, I never was in anywhere where they had outside ones. Ours was half outside, it was nae really in the house, it was just out a wee bit in what they called the closet and that was up a stair.

SR So you never lived in a house with a midden?

WS No, I stayed next to a midden because the middens then... to let you understand... it'll take a long time to tell you. All the ash, you see there were no council men then, all the ashes from your fire had to go somewhere and where did you put them? - you put them in the midden; all the slops, old clothes, papers, boxes - wooden boxes, - they were all shoved into this midden. The midden would be about the length of this house, with just a big open front on it - nae door or nothing like that, but it was open on the top.

SR And it was built out of brick was it?

WS All brick aye, and at the end was the toilet places with two doors on them, and you could go in there, the seats were that long you could get four on the one seat! Well that just went down to the midden.

SR And was there one toilet for men and one for women?

WS No anybody went in. And that was all thrown in - slops, bones, old soup, anything at all was all dumped into the midden and the ashes, and old clothes if you had any. And there was a man came round periodically - he had the contract to empty them out, I mind that poor soul doing that job, I know we were watching him while he done it.

SR Did they smell?

WS They smelled to high heaven, 'cos everything was in them - excreta - they were all in there. We used to play round about there. That's what you want to know isn't it?

SR Yes.

WS Well we used to play round there, and we used to play on the top we'd play all kinds of games, boys' daredevils stunts.

SR Was there a lot of disease amongst children?

WS The fever hospital used to be down the road there, you see it's there yet.

SR At Drumshoreland?

WS No, there's one at Drumshoreland - that's the geriatric unit. It's down right opposite the Golden Window chip place, right opposite, that was it. The chemist went in there after he retired, Mr. Glass, he was the chemist, 'cos I got the job of digging his garden one time. My brother used to be on the sewerage, my eldest one, ken you'd go down the sewers to the settling tank and you'd go through your training. Youngsters, you used to get youngsters doing everything down there. I was digging in that garden and you used to dig up cloths, he'd buried them in the ground.

SR Had we better go down to the Centre then?

WS Yes, they'll be waiting on you.

SR And then we'll come back and talk.

SR What about the women - was it difficult for women?

WS Aye, they had all the chores to do, they had all the hard work to do and the bearing of the children. My mother - I would nae like to get a leg like that, I've never seen anybody with a leg like that, you'll understand what it was. I think it would be a burst varicose vein in her ankle, and I've seen her dressing it and I often wonder how they lived with that. She ought to have kept the wound open oughtn't she?

SR Well I'm not a medical doctor, I'm only a doctor because I have written a thesis.

WS Oh I thought you were on the practicing side.

SR No though I work in the Dept. of Community Medicine, I'm interested in medicine but more on the social side.

WB Aye, how they got the fee and how you had to pay the fee. One doctor was a better doctor than the other.

SR You reckon that Dr. Kelso was better than Dr. Scott.

WS Aye, he was (hallowed?). He had a rough voice and he spoke Highland. He used to give you a cigarette when you were a wee boy too.

SR Did he, for you to smoke or for you to take back for your dad?

WS No, for you to smoke.

SR So kids used to smoke in those days?

WS No, oh no you got killed if you smoked or played cards. I mind I got caught playing cards and got took into the house. I told my mother about it and she said well you just have to take what comes to you. You were afraid of your life doing anything wrong then because you got punished for it. I only clipped the school once, I would nae

go because I had a black eye, and then they sent a girl for you to see why you were nae at the school, and I got told by my mother to go back, and I got half way back but I didnae go.

SR When you moved to this house did this house have electricity and water and everything?

WS It was as it is now. They were very good because there was modern sinks out there. The toilet was nae there, it was nearer this way a bit, the bathroom was built on. It was the same with the hole in the wall you've heard me talking about, that passage way came along - that's the real wall, that was the back of the beds. That's an addition put on to make the two rooms.

SR And you came here with your parents?

WS Aha, from Newton Grange. I came back before them for I had got the job on the railway.

SR And where did you stay?

WS I stayed with my sister.

SR You had to pay her?

WS Aye, oh aye you had to pay - 25s per week.

SR And how many people did she have lodging?

- WS She had another two at that time. Two men that had come for to make a new thread works for the oil works was away at that time and they were in a new factory - Coates the thread people - well they had a big factory up there that employed some people.
- SR Yes, when the factory was going did it employ many women or ...?
- WS Aha, all women - one man I think. They'd taken on one or two men because we kept two of them down here at that time as well because you'd do anything for to get extra money. They were the men that came as engineers, they came to put the spinning machines in. Some of these spinning machines they put in were over a 100 years old, they brought them through from Paisley, that was just after the war.
- SR The second war?
- WS The second war aye.
- SR Did it provide much employment or was it just ...?
- WS Employment for the girls, aye. There was unemployment for a while, here - There was a lot of people went away and never came back again. They'd got houses you see and didnae come back. At Newtongrange where I went, coal mining – there was a lot of Broxburn people went there. They never came back again.
- SR What about young women - did they go away and work in service?
- WS They went away abroad a lot of them. There was a scheme came out because you could get a free passage across, I had a cousin that went. She did

well, because it happened she had a son that became a film star out there - a real film star you know.

Side 1 of tape ends here.

SR So in the 26 strike did the people pawn most of their possessions and then were unable to redeem them?

WS Oh they redeemed them but sometimes the very poor ones were nae able to redeem them, they just had to let them go. And then there'd be fighting around the house after that - the man would go to get his suit to put on and there'd be no suit there.

SR Yes, and it was always the women who decided which things to pawn and the man who

WS The man had nothing to do with it, as I told you, it was all done in secret. The man would be wanting the suit in the middle of the week and there'd a row for there'd be no suit for him. Ken, there were some men used to drink the (red biddy?) that was methylated spirits.

SR Really? Working men or just ...?

WS Oh aye, working men.

SR Was that because it was much cheaper or ..?

WS Much much cheaper you see. Gave them a good drink you know what I mean?
In Glasgow, not here of course, they used to take the methylated spirit
in the glass-mantles outside they used to put gas in.

WS But here they used to drink it?

SR Oh aye. It affected their body. Some of them used to smack their
lips all the time, and at that time you'd see them lying, rolling on the
ground drunk. When it came time to go home, you had to go home and get
somebody to carry you home.. There's things that stand out in your mind,
I mind this old lady, she stayed up near me, but they found her
down Greendykes Road lying outside another window, and she was
drunk, she could nae get home. That's how life went, it was nae
garden of roses.

SR And yet your family must have been quite well off because you could
afford to buy this house - compared with other families.

WS You did nae buy the house, you had to pay the house up on a mortgage
the same as they do now.

SR Yes, but I mean most people didn't even have that chance did they?

WS No, they didn't buy the house, it was me that bought the house - me
and another brother, that was the policeman.

SR And when did you actually buy it then?

WS You actually bought it on the pay up system, the same as now, in 1931

and it £1-18s-3d per month, that's what we had to pay for 15 years was the length of the loan. It was paid up long ago now.

SR Mmmm, but many people weren't even able to do that, they could just pay rent.

WS No the rent on the house would be 2s 6d per week to us - that was a lot of money, then it went up to 3s 6d, but these men that built these houses - in the old days when they were built - this was built in 1903, these men must have been up there making extra money than the jobs they were on, maybe they would build the houses and as you say they would be a wee bit richer than anybody else. Because the man that built that big one, he was on err ... the paraffin sheds, you see all the oil wasn't out in barrels in the old days there were nae big tanks for to take it, it all went out in ordinary barrels, it all went out that way in wagons, but now they go in tanks.

SR Did you work on the passenger railways or the goods ones that shifted all these things around?

WS You worked on the two, a good guard was handier than a passenger guard because the goods guard could work the two.

Tape recorder switched off here.

WS If you were out anywhere you always stopped outside the village and you played back into your own band hall. You know where the clock is? Well you used to form a circle there if the tune was nae finished, you'd finish the tune there and sometimes you'd give them an extra one.

SR And where did the Catholic band go?

WS Well they did the same, they went to their own hall. On that one occasion the two came in, there was a big celebration on that day of course. I was nae in the band then, that was 1901, 1902, I was nae there then. There used to be big contests, that old man was telling me, in 94 in Broxburn with the brass bands - big band contests. Of course, Broxburn was a busy place at one time. We used to go the brass band and we always used to have to practice before you could go on the stage and it was always at a pub, so we used to do all our practicing at all these different pubs. At the sports - the Kelso sports - and the other sports that was held at Broxburn, we had the pipe band contests. And the greasy pole, there'd be a big big pole, twenty odd feet high, and it was all greased with soap, soft soap, and if you climbed to the top there was a ham at the top - a whole ham - and if you could get the ham you brought it down.

SR Did anyone ever do it?

WS I dinnae mind,, but somebody must have someway of doing it. You had to put old clothes on ye for to go up.

SR Anyway, I'd better be going. Thank you very much indeed.

Transcript

WS

I was born in Greendykes Road
in Broxburn, in 1926.

Industrial
Information

I started my working life on
the railways at Newtongrange
but this was only a summer job
because the place was emptied
out of people. They had all
gone over to America and all
these places.

Helensburgh

I went to Helensburgh as a
porter because I couldnae
get a job for love nor money
in those days. You had to
get references before they
would take you in anywhere.

Dole

I came back to Newtongrange
and went on the dole at Dalkeith.

Shale

I then managed to get a job
at the open cast shale at
Duddingston near Newton,
that was at the other side of
Winchburgh. There was two

mines there and one was
opencast, which closed down
because it wasn't profitable to
work it. At the opencast I would
say it would be ordinary work. The
face would be about forty foot high
and that was all shale. The way they
worked it, they didn't blast, they
holed it out from the bottom, and
the top weight brought it over.
That was my job sometimes to
sit on the top and watch it crack
open. We used to put a wee stick
across and watch it moving.

Hutches

The shale was loading into hutches.

Pony

There was a wee pony that
came in and took maybe six
hutches out at a time to the
breaker at Duddingston.

Winchburgh Works

From the breaker it went to
Winchburgh Oil works, which was
called Oakbank Oil works.

I worked on the train at the
oil works taking the oil out
and bringing, the empties

back in and bringing the coal
in to the fire at that time. The
local people called it the 'shunt'.

Brothers

My four brothers worked in the oil works.

My Fathers' Work

My father was last to leave
the Oilworks. He was working
with what they called the
experimental to do with
torts. There was a wee
laboratory where they took
samples and the chemist came
over with these samples and
took them over to the refinery
so that they could tell us what
was coming out. When the works
closed down in 1926 they were
given the option for tae work
and get a share of the profits
when the time came but they
said 'no we're going to
strike'. Well the Company
said if you strike the works
will never open again because
once the retorts cooled
they would disintegrate and

we would never get them started again. This was because they were massive things.

Working Hours

My father used to work eight to ten hours a day but it was seven days a week for some men. My father worked the seven days because he got more money for the family. They worked what they cried 'a long term on', instead of coming off at the weekend they'd go on a double shift and start at six in the morning and go right on till about six at night or maybe a bit longer. You got paid on Saturday but if the old folk were hard up I used to get a line when I was a youngster and I used to take it up and ask Mr. Roberts if he could get paid on Friday instead of Saturday. The oilworkers weren't well paid then, they got a gold

sovereign and that had to
keep the whole family.

1926 Strike

During the 1926 strike most of
the people pawned their
possessions or redeemed them,
they just had to let them go.
Then there would be fighting
around the house after that.

Paraffin Cancer

That was one of the bad jobs
in the stills. They used to
squeeze the wax and get the
oil out that is where the men
got cancer. Dr. Scott was
complimented because he had
a cure for paraffin cancer and
he got so much money for it.

Domestic Life

Housing

We had a butt and ben. It
consisted of a sitting room
and a bedroom. They were
built in 1903.

Sleeping arrangements

My parents had a room and a
bed to themselves but the
rooms were not very big.

Meal Times

At meal times we all had our

own chairs and cups.

Water

In my time we had a tap, ours was half outside, it wasn't really in the house.

Toilet

We had a toilet which everybody used and there was a man who came round periodically to clean it out. They smelled to high heaven, because everything was in them.

Rents

The rent on the house was 2/6d to us and that was a lot of money then. It then went up to 3/6d.

Bought Our House

We bought the house on a pay up system in 1931, it was £1-18-3d per month. That was what we had to pay for fifteen years, as that was the length of the loan.

Womans Work

The women had all the chores to do.

Illnesses

My brothers died with pneumonia. I saw him that night and he was laughing then, but he went a blue colour and he was

dead in the morning.

Doctors Dues

Your dues for the doctor were paid as you went along. It was 5/- or 10/- for professional duties. Dr Kelso was the best man. He was the main doctor in the 1914 war. He used to practice in Bangour Hospital.

Clothing

We didn't have enough money for more than one set of clothes. The boys used to wear short trousers and a knitted jersey with a big white rubber collar.

You had to polish it up with soap and water and dry it ready for the school in the morning.

Boots

We didn't wear boots at all in the summer time, you went barefoot. I've been up the bings in my bare feet.

Social Life

Drinks

You got a Saturday penny if you were lucky. Sometimes

the old woman used to take
a drink of whisky. I think
it was five pence for a gill
and she'd send down to the
shop for it.

Some of them drank at home.

My father coming home from
the retorts, and I would go
down for a big jug of ale.

You used to get a big jug
for a penny or tuppence.

Smoking

The kids used to smoke in those days.

Cards

I mind I got caught playing
cards and I was taken into
the house and told my mother
about it and she said well
you'll just have to take what
comes to you.

War

In 1939 war broke out. I
maintain that's where the
first bombs fell in Broxburn.

INDEX

bare feet 8
baths 4
bings 8
childbirth 6
clothing 8
childhood - work 9
coal miners 1
doctors 4
drink 8-9,13
- meths 13
family 2
- size 5,6
housing 6,14
illness 9
lodgings 2,12
midden 10
migration 1,5,13
Oilworks 6
opencast mine 2-3
paraffin 4
- cancer 4
play 10-11 .
pawning 13r
ponies 13
railways 2
religion 5
rents 14
retorts 6
sanitation 10,11
shifts 7
sleeping arrangements 6,9
smoking 12
stillbirths 5

PLACES

America 1
Bathgate 2
Broxburn 1,2,5
Clydebank 2
Helensburgh 1
Ireland 5
Newtongrange 1,3,12

SHALE MINES

Duddingston 2,3

OIL WORKS

Winchburgh 3

stills 4

strike 1,6

thread works 12

unemployment 13

wages 7

war 2nd 2,13

water 10

women work 11,13

work - non shale 2

- shale 2-3

working conditions 3-4

hours 7