Oh yes, tennis was my pastime when I was working down the mines, and I was always up tennis at the time I was working down the mines, and I was working at the time. It's always been a part of my life. When I was a miner, tennis was the big sport. It was a way of life, a way of getting away from the harsh realities of mining. 

Winchburgh Albion was one of the big teams in the area, and they had a big following. At that time, it was a sport that could be played by anyone, regardless of their background. It was accepted as a snob sport, but it was only that 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. 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 can think of.

Oh yes, when I was in the mines, as I say. I took up tennis while I was in the mines. Tennis was my pastime. They used to bet the horses and had to pay the bookie, 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 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 he had a few...then 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!

Winchburgh Albion, Bridgend Boys, it was the Bridgend team, and Linlithgow Boys, it would be Linlithgow! And when you met, oh, it could be a ‘Donnybrook’ at times! Bridgend Rovers playing Winchburgh Albion in the Scottish Juniors 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.

You had the 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 Pumpherston, and Winchburgh and Middleton Hall, and Uphall station, and Pumpherston! Great rivalry went on and the characters that were in the mines.....I came out in the bowling. I think Winchburgh had the best by far character, and as far as I was concerned, was Bob Milliken. Bob was a great bowler, he bowled for the county, and I think he went to Queens Park at one 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 seat, and you had hundreds everywhere. They were all great said I. They all Railroad each other!

You watched your local team, you didn’t run away supporting anybody else. Winchburgh Albion, Bridgend Boys, it was the Bridgend team,........Linlithgow Boys, it would be Linlithgow? And that was it! And when you met, it’s all about the Shale Villages. The communities that served Scotland’s shale oil Industry. 

Boys and their Games


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A project by the Almond Valley Heritage Trust