Young’s Paraffin Light and Mineral Oils Company was the first major shale oil company. Between 1864 and 1871, over 500 houses were built in the West Calder area to house the company’s workforce.

In Addiewell, rows of single and two-storey buildings were built to house oil workers and their families. Shale miners were housed separately in closely packed rows at Happy Land in West Calder, and at Mossend.

“People lived closer to each other in those days. When we stayed in Happy Land, we stayed door by door and if there was anything wrong wi’ your mother, the woman next door came in and saw that you got your face washed and awa’ tae school and she’d a bite ready for you at dinner time, and she’d your father’s dinner on the side of the fire for him comin’ hame.”

David Calder, born West Calder in 1902, recorded in 1985.

When first constructed, Young’s Oil Company houses in the West Calder area were described as “commodious and comfortable”. As the company expanded, it acquired much poorer housing from failed oil companies, whilst its own financial problems left little to invest in maintaining and upgrading its properties. Young’s company faced growing criticism over the quality of its housing.

Young’s properties were amongst first to be demolished in a programme of slum clearance. Today only Faraday Street, built to house foremen at the Addiewell works, remains of almost a thousand houses once owned by the company.

There is a new quarter of the town towards the north west, bearing the euphonious title of “The Happy Land”, applied to it by the wits of the place. The houses are in rows, one behind another, about ten yards apart like lines of soldiers in the form of an oblong square. The houses have no gardens, but apparently were built with more regard to the utilization of the feu ground than to the health and comfort of the tenants.

“Silvester Sprightly” writing in the West Lothian Courier, June 30th 1877.