Interview with Mr. Alec Hudson.

Born: 1913, Winchburgh.

SR Were you born in Roman Camp?

AH No, no, I was born in Winchburgh. The shale mining was there. I was

Born in 1913. I'm 72 years old now.

SR And how long did you live in Winchburgh?

AH Up till I was about 11 I was still in Winchburgh. I was born in the rows in Winchburgh. And my father worked in the works. He was actually a farmer's son.

SR So he worked in the oil works?

AH He worked in the oil works. And I was born in Winchburgh in 1913. And, we were from the rows. I grew up there in a house. My father was promoted to manager up at one of the other works. Niddrie Works. Hopetoun Works actually. And we moved up there. The company bought a cottage for him up Faucheldean. I was there till I was 14, then we moved up here in 1927. I've been in this house since 1927.

SR When you lived in Winchburgh, what sort of houses did you live in there? The first house.

AH Just a room and kitchen actually and a scullery and an outside toilet, attached to the house of course.

SR With water?

AH Water. And we had a boiler in the scullery-cum-kitchenette and all the rest of it, sink and that.

SR How many of you lived there?

AH Just mainly my mother, my father, myself and a cat and a dog. My sister was 12 year older than me and she was out in service and only came periodically.

SR So there were just two of you.

AH Just two. Well there were three of us really. My mother, father and myself, but just two of a family yes.

SR And your house had water. Did it have electricity?

AH Only thing we had was we had paraffin lamps. Electricity was in the street outside with tall wooden poles and they had these carbon rods things. And that just came together as I grew up. High intensity light and general illumination up and down the middle of the rows. That was all.

SR So it was quite a good quality house?

AH A good quality house. They were new houses actually.

SR When were the Winchburgh houses built then?

AH Must have been about 1901 I think. 'Cos I think the works was there for 60 years and it shut down in 1961. It was one of the last to shut down.

SR And did you leave school at 14?

AH Left school at 14.

SR And went to work?

AH Well I came up here at 14, and I started serving my time as an engineer.

SR In Roman Camp oil works?

AH Roman Camp oil works I did 6 months and I been doing at Broxburn, what was left of the refinery down there, I went down there and do there four and a half years. And I finished my time doing there and came back to Roman Camp for a period

SR And when you first moved into this house did it have water and electricity

 and toilets and so on.

AH This was one of the only two houses that had electric light inside. Was this house and the electrical engineer who stayed up in the middle. This was actually the foreman's block. One end was the foreman engineer and you had the foreman of electricity in the middle and my father, he and the previous man, he'd been a miner, the mining foreman in here, like the man was a miner in this house before. We were the second tenant in this house. These houses were designed in 1908 I think it was and they were built by 1910. This particular one was built in 1910 I think. Roughly.

SR And you had water?

AH We had water and everything, yes.

SR And did all the other houses in Roman Camp have water?

AH No. There was still existing wells outside actually.

SR Those sort of pump things?

AH Those previous to us they had dry lavatories outside actually. And for

 water they got it in from, what we'd call a stand pipe, there were four of

 them spaced in the rows. But when we came in here we'd water in here.

SR But the other houses were not..

AH And then we had baths fitted in here in 1933, we'd baths fitted in here actually. Previous to that you managed in the washhouse over there in a tub or else a tub with boiled water. You heated up your water, filled the tub and bathed in the room.

SR And when you first started work what sort of hours did you work? Was it very long?

AH Well. It was twenty past six in the morning till 4.00 at night I think. I know that time because we'd down at Broxburn for night school and that.

SR Did you? That was so you could get promoted up? It was part of your training?

AH Well actually it was part of being an apprentice. Well anyway,... with night school and then after so long there I went to Heriot Watt day classes. I had Saturday classes in the Heriot Watt. Instead of going to the football matches and that there was a lot, there was myself, Fife, the Borders and all that. It was in Chambers St. then of course. A technical college. We'd spend the Saturday afternoon from about 2.00 till about 7.00. We'd 5 hours on a Saturday afternoon down at the classes. Technical drawing, laboratory work and all this. It was general engineering stuff. And then, because I got good marks for that, they must have brought it up with the company, but anyway I got two summer release terms from serving my time in Heriot Watt.

SR How about when you were living in Winchburgh, when you were a boy. Was that very different from Roman Camp?

AH No, just similar actually. We'd the same thing, we just had, in the Winter time, all the different seasons all the different things. We were playing marbles, or boules as we called them. All the different games; ... and all this, kick the kirkrag, always rattling on people's doors and running. All these sort of boys' things and that.

SR And there was not a lot of poverty there?

AH Well there was a certain amount, but it wasn't noticeable. You know what I mean.

SR Everyone was the same were they?

AH Everybody was the same. I used to run about with pads on me trousers and that. Most of us used to have bare feet, by choice, all summer, even when the harvesting was done, some of us would run through the stubble fields with our bare feet after the workmen had finished cutting the harvest. And of course as soon as there was a weekend we weren't at school, worked at the tattie howking and that, setting stakes; used to go out with potatoes. They were all over the fields in what we call stegs......... I seen us working all Saturday for a, we'd only get a tanner....

SR In Roman Camp was there a lot of smoke and dirt coming out of the oil works? Was it very smoky and dirty and polluting to the air, or was it quite clear.

AH Oh, a certain amount of pollution. A certain amount of dust came off the works. It was always a dusty place. As far as the spent shale was concerned and that, of course we were [...inaudible...] and you'd suddenly get, depend which way the wind was blowing, and with dust getting blown back from the tip to you.

SR But you didn't feel it was really dirty all the time?

AH We used to - looking back on it they wouldn't do nowadays, but we thought nothing of it, because it was our life and it was our, - it was our daily

bread, the works. But looking back on it now, it was a pretty dirty job.

SR What about your actual work. Was your work dirty?

AH It was mainly, well it was all, well actually once I came out of the training it was during maintenance work on machinery and all this sort of stuff. When I served my time, it was all these machines [listed] all this general work down in Broxburn refinery we did all the overhauls for the locomotives and the surrounding works and as far as turning tyres on wheels, on wagon

wheels and locomotive wheels and all this sort.

SR And while you were living at home did you always give your wage to your mother?

AH Yes.

SR And then she'd give it back to buy your clothes?

AH Oh yes. Well, mother bought most of my clothes when I was in the house

 still. I didn't smoke in these days. I didn't start smoking till I was

 21, before I start smoking at all.

SR What about mines? Did a lot of people who lived in Roman Camp work in the mines as well?

AH There was only about 4 actually working in the mines... [inaudible] the other fellows worked in the works.

SR Because there were mines round here weren't there? There were mines in Roman Camp weren't there?

AH There were 7 altogether.

SR But where did the people who worked in the mines come from then? If they weren't living here.

AH Broxburn. Used to walk from Broxburn up here, or cycle up. Winchburgh and that - there were some lads used to walk over from Edinburgh, do a hard day-shift's work and walk back into Edinburgh again.

SR So there were people who lived in Edinburgh who worked in the shale mines.

AH And Winchburgh.

SR I didn't realise that. I thought it was very localised.

AH Oh no, some of them came from different bits you know. There was one thing about the works. I only wish I'd taken more note - you'd a great class of different personalities.

SR In the oil works, not for you, but for other people, what were the working conditions like? Were they good, or was there a lot of long hours, poor conditions and poor pay - for most of the men, most of the labourers.

AH In what respects?

SR Well, did they have to work in very dusty, gassy conditions, very long hours.

AH Yes. Well we didn't think they were long hours. I mean, as I say, from 20 past six in the morning till 4.00 at night. Shift work was only on a straight 8 hours. You'd have a break at breakfast time, when you'd go off for half an hour, and a break at lunchtime, well dinnertime we'd call it actually, from 1.00 to half past one, and then you'd stop at 4.00.

SR What about holidays? Did you get any holidays? - paid holidays.

AH No. We'd New Year's Day off, but we didn't get paid for it. We didn't even get Christmas. Only got New Year's Day but we didn't get paid for it. It was a holiday but we didn't get paid.

SR When did you start getting paid holidays.

AH I started getting paid holidays when I was promoted to the staff in 1939.

That's June 1939.

SR When did Roman Camp oil works close? That was in 1950 something was it?

AH That was 1956 or 7, I'm not quite sure of the exact date.

Questions

1. *Describe what Alec’s first house was like.*
2. *What hours did Alec work.*
3. *Alec was promoted – explain the training he had to go through for this to happen.*
4. *Alec describes the kinds of activities he took part in as a boy. Briefly describe what he did.*
5. *Did Alec think his work was dirty – give a reason for your answer.*
6. *What holidays did Alec get?*
7. *Choose the five key points from this interview that would tell someone who knew nothing about life in West Lothian what life was like in the period.*
8. *As a historian write down three more questions that you could ask Alec about his life.*