Interview with David Mackenzie

GC You left school when you were..........?

DM Fourteen!

GC Fourteen? And you started work.......?

DM I'd say in about March 1915, in Breich Pit!

GC And what was your job there?

DM Pony driver in Breich Pit.

GC Can you remember much about what happened as a pony driver? What was your job?

DM Well, it was in about.......I had four faces to go to, to bring the shale

hutches out to the loading point, you know, so it was quite interesting

you know! Quite interesting!

GC And you had any problems with the ponies?

DM An odd time! A Sunday night would be a wee bit fresh and they would

get away......running about the different parts of the section, and you

would feel a bit angry at them at the time, you know! Running around

the place, you know! There was an odd time, a Sunday night, you know!

GC And how many ponies did you have? In Breich Pit?

DM In Breich Pit! I would say over twenty! There were two shifts going,

you know! Dayshift and night!

GC And was there any one in particular that was your favourite? Any pony?

DM Pony?........It would be Darkie, I think! It was a good little pony,

you know! No trouble at all, bar an odd Sunday night! Yes, it was

quite interesting!

GC Good! And how long did you.......how long did you spend in Breich, as

a pony driver?

DM I would be there about two years and then I was transferred to Forty!

Forty shale mine!

GC That's at Gavieside?

DM Gavieside, yes!

GC And were you still a pony driver there?

DM I was still a pony driver, there, yes! I'm talking about most of the time!

GC And how many ponies did they have at Gavieside?

DM Six.

GC What did you do next?

DM I became a fireman in Burngrange Pit!

GC And what was that job?

DM That was......you went round before the start of the shift! And

you examined all the working places, in your section, you know, for any

methane or firedamp, and then you reported in a........on a sheet, and it

was usually posted on the pit head as well, that the air was good or

conditions were good, so it was really a safety man, before the miners

started work, you know!

GC And did you have any special training to become a fireman?

DM Well, I went to the mining class, you know, started them at.....I was

asked if I would join the Mine Rescue Station and we trained in theHeriot

Watt College in Edinburgh, so I qualified as a........mine rescue.....

member there, their team! And it was quite interesting work! Training

under ground with the oxygen masks on, you know! It was quite

interesting work!

GC Was there a mixture of coal and shale miners when you were at Heriot

Watt, training, or was it all shale works?

DM Well, our two hours was usually all shale miners.

GC And did you then get a certificate to say that you........?

DM Aye.....a silver.....a silver badge, to say that you were an able-bodied

member of the Fire Service, you know!

GC Were there any accidents......during your spell with the pits and mines?

DM No! We had no callouts for the Brigades during my time!

GC Were there any accidents when you were working in any of these pits and

mines, when you were there?

DM There were several.....miners injured.....and they eventually died, you know!

GC So, when you started work, which Company would you start work with?

DM Pumpherston......with Scottish Oils!

GC Did you work in many places where there was lots of gas?

DM Well......I'd not say......a lot......but then during my time in Burn-

grange, a few times I had the fire damp, as they call it, methane, CH4,

an odd time, and pull the miners out until you got the place properly

cleared! But.....in my fireman's experience, you never took a flame

lamp down with you! When you went down to examine the shaft, you a lways carried one light which was an oil flame safety lamp, and you carried no other lamp! In some of the mines that I've been in, you only carried one lamp, and that was an oil flame safety lamp!

GC A Glenny lamp?

DM It was a Glenny! Yes! And eventually they allowed the fireman to carry

the electric battery lamp! But you always had your flame safety lamp,

which you used during the nightly inspection, you know, ventilation and gas!

GC Would you say that Burngrange was bad for gas?

DM No, I wouldn't say that! It was only when they extracted maybe say, two pillars out, and left the whole of that, before the whole thing came in, closed, you know!

GC And how was this brought to the surface?

DM This gas.......... it was an old bore hole put down to find the early Burngrange mine, which was above Burngrange Pit, and this is one the

same as was put down, to find out where the Burngrange seam was! Then a wee bit over that.....about two hundred yards further east, I remember

the Americans putting down an oil well, in 1920. The Americans bored

there for oil!

GC And where this.......where Burngrange was, this outflow of gas, is this

dangerous gas that came from below ground?

DM Well, the gas that has been coming from that bore hole is still methane,

CH4, because when I was in the Fire Service, years ago, I was a member of the Midlothian Brigade previous to the war, and was transferred into the National Fire Service. An odd night there would be a spotter plane came over, just to find out......as I say, that bore hole is blowing again, and lit up at Burngrange so you had to send two men up to damp it down, with a wet sack, you know, but the gas is still coming out of that hole after eighty years.......over a hundred years.....yes! It's still giving off gas!

GC But there's not any fire now?

DM No, no! You could light a match to it, and set it on fire, which the

kids used to do, during the war, just before dark, and you had to go up

and damp it with the wet sacks, just smother it, you know! But there is

gas in the area, you know! The whole of the area!

GC Is this gas just released at ground level, or is there anything takes it beyond........

DM No, just the underground pressure sends it to the surface! Yes!

GC And is it fenced off or anything like that?

DM Well, I haven't been over for a number of years, but it was never fenced off! No! And that was from the early Burngrange mine, which was above Burngrange shaft!

GC Did you find that the ventilation in any of the mines.........?

DM No, the ventilation was all pretty good......there were big Sirocco fans,

you know, the fans they put in nowadays are very good! In the early days,

the miners couldn't go down......well, I've been in mines, where the old

method of ventilation was still there, but not used, where they used to

light a fire to heat the air, and the hot air rose and the cold air was

cooled down, it was natural......well, it was fire heating air, to take

the ventilation underground but not it's all electric fans, huge fans now!

**Questions**

1. *What was David’s first job?*
2. *What did David do as a pony driver? Did he have a favourite pony? What were his responsibilities?*
3. *What was David’s next job?*
4. *How did David get this job? What training did he have to go through?*
5. *David mentions a ‘glenny lamp’. Find out from your own research what a glenny lamp was.*
6. *Write down three additional questions that you could add to David’s interview to find out more about his life.*
7. *You are asked about the interview you have just read – write down the five most interesting points.*