Interview with George Bolton

GB Well, I came to the pit.......I came here in 1938, and I started in 35 in 1938, in the drawing. I drew off a Wull Kerr, you know, he belonged up Dechmont way.

Q. You started as a drawer? Now, how did you get started in the pit?

GB I got the job whenever I went to the pit. You know, at that time, the men were scarce, and there was a fella, he lost his job, and I got started on that job. As I told you already, it's hard work! In fact, if there was a job open, you had to take what you got.

Q. Had you any relations that worked in the shale mines, or pits.....?

GB My father and my brothers worked in the pit. They came here first, that's how it brought us through to Bridgend. My father took up shale mining again, he was from the coal, and he came back to the mines. Gradually we came back too, you know, to the district.

Q. And you came back....what did you do before you started in the shale mining?

GB Coal........

Q. You were in.......you were a coal miner before you.....went into shale?

GB Aye, I started in Rosewell. I worked in two pits actually, before I came here, I worked in Rosslyn and Rosewell. I had no intentions of coming through to this district, but you know how it is with families, you just come through with your father and.......my father and them came through and stayed here, before they got a house, and then we followed on at the back. So I got a job at the pit.

Q. Was it in miner's rows that you stayed?

GB No this scheme! This scheme was built in 1937, you know. My father was through in 1937, by that time, it was just the beginning of 1938, when I came through.

Q. So this was a local authority scheme.......house?

GB Aye, this was a ...........

Q. Council house...........?

Accidents

Q. Did you have any accidents?

GB Oh......

Q. What happened?

GB The police said....... Oh, that was breaking a bit shale, just a bit shale that was too heavy, you know, I'd to break it up a bit, and a bit floated up and hit me right in the eye, just hit me right in the eye!

Q. Was it like a splinter?

GB Just a splinter? It was a felled splinter!

Q. And it hit you right in the eye! What happened.....did you lose your eye?

GB No, no, I didn't lose it, there, ken, they saved it for about so many years or something and I was forced to lose it, ken, the pain was that severe......in the daylight, ken, likes of that...... light like that, affected it!

Q. Was there any compensation?

GB I got some, but not much!

Q. But you can't remember how much? When did that happen? What year did that happen?

GB Oh, not many years after the war!

Q. And that was when after the war finished? Did it affect you very much?

GB No, no.

Q. You didn't let it bother you at all?

GB No, no. It never bothered me......

Social Life

Q. Did you enjoy working?

GB Oh aye, it was happy.... there were a lot of young fellows there, it was just like a ......everybody knew each other. Och, aye, everybody knew each other, it was a good place to work.

Q. Was the social life quite good at that time?

GB Well, our social life......as far as the pit was concerned, it was alright, but you know, it was an awful place to work, they kept a hold of you, if you were working in it on your Saturday backshift, you were kept to half past seven, there were no early louses or anything like that. Oh, that was before the war I'm talking about! But they never restricted, ken, likes of now, you've got all these amendments now, they try to suit the workers now, but there was no suiting the workers then, you would either do it or you weren't there.

Q. Did you ever have any reasons......or the Company didn't have any reasons to say anything like that to you?

GB No, no.

GB So, you left and you went back to the coal mining? After you left....

Q. Why did you leave?......You actually left when the mine closed?

GB Aye.....the men.....I was away.....that mine went two years after I left, because the men......drifting away. As the men were drifting away, that was less money and that meant job losses.

Q. And do you feel that the miners got a raw deal?

GB I would have thought that....after all, it was the men in the shale that was keeping the......open as far as Grangemouth was concerned, it was these boys that was keeping it......but they just kept it going as long as it suited themselves. To me, anyway!

Differences between coal mining and shale mining

Q. What would you say the different conditions if there were any, between coal mining and shale mining?

GB Well, I would say that the shale mining was hard work, ken, I mean as far as facemen and drawers were concerned. But you must remember that when we left the pit, they were introducing eh, electric boring machines, you see, at that time there were all hand boring machines, but just the last two years, they were introducing electric machines, ken, electric borers......and that made an awful difference in the pit, ken. You take it, a rickety.......it took you as long for to bore one hole or two but with these things you could just......ken electric....just in the latter stages, they introduced the.........

Q. But that would increase their production?

GB That would increase......but of course they would get less percentage for the ton, ken, if you get it easier one way, they take it off you the other way. Oh aye, they would get more production, right enough.

Q. In other words, you couldn't win?

GB Oh aye, you couldn't win! You couldn't win! Oh they seemed to do alright. I wasn't in it all the time, with the...... they were just introducing electric borers there and electricity into the pit. You see there was no electricity, well, there was always electricity in it, but not for the boring like, for boring holes.

Q. Was coal was a bit ahead in terms of technology?

GB Oh aye, they were ahead! Of course, the coal was always ahead, they had machinery, ken, faceline pans and machines for cutting coal, och, when I left the coal.....before I came through here, ken, they had all mechanised........not to the great extent that it is now.

Q. And wage comparison! When you left the coal, to start in the shale, was it better?

GB Well, at that time, it was about a shilling a difference, with the Company wage rate, ken, I think the shale was 9/- or something and it was only eight was the minimum wage like, the shale was about a shilling above the coal...........

***Questions***

1. When did George start work in the pit?
2. Did George have family working in the pit? If so, who?
3. Where did George live?
4. Did he ever have any accidents? What happened?
5. Did George like working in the pit? Give a piece of evidence for your answer.
6. Describe the main differences between coal and shale production according to George.
7. If you were the interviewer what would you have asked George? Try to come up with three questions you could have asked him.
8. You have to do a presentation on George’s interview. Write down five key points from the interview that you are going to include.