

Interviewee(s): David Spence (DS)	Interviewer(s): Unknown Female (UF)
Date of Interview: ?	Ref: EL2-32-1-5-T
REGION	East Lothian
TOWN	Tranent

0h 00m 00s

DS: -ye ken. Ye could hear- ye could hear- and it was boys lying on the grass, ye ken, wi a long thread and just a pin ontae your windowsill.

UF: Mmhm.

DS: And they kept doing this, ye see, it was a rickety tick [*laughter*]. So, there were ploys here, but the summer... playing rounders there and these young- the miners, the bat was a pick-shaft and it could skelp and we youngsters were away oot on the perimeter, rushing and carrying the balls. It was great: the whole village out, playing rounders. And that second door over there... and we've had Penston band- I've had them publicised fairly recently, but the then bandmaster – and a great miner, too – he lived in that house. And summer nights, he had a table, he brought it out the door and one o these big horn gramophones. That's the first music I could say that I ever heard. And he was bandmaster o Penston band. And there was a lot o Grays living here, too. And there was a lot o Gordons, as I've already said; ma mother was a Gordon and there was Tom Gordon o the shop, William Gordon, [?] Gordon. There was Gordons. And half East Lothian I think is populated wi them now [*laughter*]. So, it's nostalgic. A could almost tell ye all the different families that were in each house. And now, of course, if ye ever meet anybody belonging tae New Winton, there's a kinship and, ye ken, a nostalgia. And... they're lovely country houses for folk now. Of course, they've aw nice bathrooms [*laughter*]... but the [?] still there for an emergency [*laughter*].

0h 02m 00s

[*pause in recording*]

DS: Oor gardens was round the back there, ye see, and a can remember- it was a cruel period, too, but I can remember the squealing and squealing. I was very young. And a squad o men up at the garden... and we peeped through their legs and they had a pig on its back, and there was as many men holding its legs doon and a saw its throat being slitted; I've never forgot it this day. Oh dear, dear, dear. That was hard, that was hard. But that was life I suppose, there, there. So...

[*pause in recording*]

DS: -hand end o the facing row there. In ma day, although it's used as a garage now, a builder, but that was a reading room. That's what was known. There was occasionally... there was the wee services... church, etcetera... and a wedding occasionally but since ma researching in retirement, it was built, as I've already remarked, by Lady Ruthven, the village, but that was an appendage built as a school... and that was in 1855 that place was built. And I would... like someday... that the villagers may need a wee small library... and have that restored tae status because it's a part o the story o pits... because I've read in ma researches in the early setting o that period, that there was a lot o disquiet in certain quarters about the lack o education o young miners and miners' families.

0h 04m 22s

And no wonder, as some o them remarked at that time, they were working fourteen hours down a pit. But- I think I'd need to check ma dates but there was education clauses put in roughly the 1860s;

am not certain o the dates, I have them in ma notes at home but certainly, there were clauses that there had tae be so many hours per week o education, but the big hindrance was the long periods that they were underground, sleeping, etcetera. But it was a start. So... all that social... moves or suchlike stemmed from the revelations o the 1842 Commission. And Commissioner R.H. Franks who did... Stirlingshire, Fifeshire, Clackmannanshire and the three Lothians and he took so many volumes o evidence frae young miners, frae old ladies and others, that the nation was appalled at what went on in coalfields. And a think these moves tae get some education intae the youngsters at least was a move in the right direction.

0h 06m 02s

And the Scots' education, as ye know of course, led the world's field in providing such educational facilities in some villages and towns, etcetera, etcetera. So, there's a wee bit... who lived here if he can remember, where his memory starts and a remember at that door... ma mother in the winter, she would put a scarf on me wi the tails hanging down [*laughter*]... and a wouldn't go but ultimately a went, till the door was shut and then a took the scarf [*laughter*]... a took it off and laid it at the door [*laughter*]. [*laughter*] A felt it was demeaning ma manhood [*laughter*]... and a was just a young boy. So, a had a wee bit independence even then. But isn't it a pretty village?

UF: Very pretty.

UF: Yes, it is.

DS: And you're lucky today that the sun's shining on it... and am pleased to see at least there's one reekin lum.

UF: Yes [*laughter*].

DS: That there's still some coal being burnt [*laughter*].

[*pause in recording*]

DS: Now, am now at the junction – or we're now at the junction – o the Ormiston-Winton road; it's just outside Tranent and just in front o us was the site o the tollhouse. That was Tranent Toll. And before a got involved wi all this research in mining, some twelve years ago or so, a was researching the turnpikes and Basil Skinner in the extramural in Edinburgh University... and it was fascinating how the transport evolved through tollhouses, etcetera.

0h 08m 18s

And a have a mass o evidence... o East Lothian tollhouses and committees. And a can recollect and a have pages and pages o notes because the officers in charge o roads at that time and tolls took a census which finally led- and someday I'll have that written out or published. They took a census in the county o the traffic for a whole year and it was presented tae parliament, etcetera and the leading [?] of East Lothian and it led tae 1878, the roads [?]. And here's a tollhouse, Tranent tollhouse, o ma days and latterly, living in it in our day, it wasn't a tollhouse but the roadman with his hammer and his wire specs, there were [?]- places at the sides o the roads, where he broke all these whins for road metal. And I can see him and I knew his name, wi his hammer, the whole day long, week in, week out, breaking these big lumps. And of course, that was the whin, that was the whin and it went through whin dykes in the coalfields.

0h 10m 02s

[*pause in recording*]

DS: -a wee bit I want about Winton...

UF: Look, I'm just testing the sound, Davie.

DS: Yes.

UF: So, just...

DS: Well-

UF: Just say something so I can...

DS: I'd like tae say a wee bit more about Winton-

UF: Uhuh.

DS: -if ye've still got the tape on Winton, anyway.

UF: Right. Do you want to say it right now, cause we'll have to piece it altogether?

DS: Yes. Yes.

UF: Ok.

DS: Are ye on... are ye on...

UF: Mmhm.

DS: Track?

UF: Turn round and look at me, though.

DS: *[laughter]* Got some nice pictures.

Both: *[laughter]*

DS: Have tae have a laugh. I forgot tae mention... when I was through Winton. And I had a memory o mine frae very young, must be one o my earliest memories because as children in New Winton, a can remember an old lady. Av since discovered her name; she was Jessie Gray. But in the summer... sitting on a stool in the sun at the front door and there was a few of us who would gather round her. She never spoke; wrinkled and grey, smoking a clay pipe. Never a word did you ever hear her say and we were well warned. Certainly, ma mother told me: she had worked in the pits.

0h 12m 02s

And there, in ma mature days or should I put it ma archaeological days of the present, I've had a link, a direct link, wi a young girl working in the pits around New Winton.

[pause in recording]

UF: Right.

DS: This is Levenhall roundabout. And I'd a letter some many years ago frae the Royal Scots Museum about Wallyford Brickworks. Well, a knew the Wallyford Brickworks were built in ma time at Fleets, about 1924 or thereabouts; however, a went tae the old manager... at Wallyford, Davie Campbell. A says 'Davie, Wallyford Brickworks'... and Davie said 'there used tae be an old gentleman wi a tile hat living at Levenhall down there'. And he was one o the Christies, the Christie brothers. And right where the roundabout is now, there were two kilns, single fire. They were firing... one fire, firing the

both kilns. And there was a road for the carts going in one way and out the other. And there was a tunnel which musta been a day-level. So, there's a wee bit history but... the museum. I asked them- gave them the information and they said they had a letter from Australia asking for information o Christie brothers' Wallyford brickworks. Well, I says 'there's your answer'.

0h 14m 04s

[pause in recording]

UF: -if it's on. Alright.

DS: Well, we're at the Edinburgh side o Prestongrange territory here. And this used tae be the old East Lothian-Midlothian boundary, on the coast road. But older still, and there was an act o 1750 tae improve the post road through the county o Haddington. And before I was put in bondage wi Frank Tindall, doon at Prestongrange, I researched the turnpikes in East Lothian and it was an interesting... and I'd like someday, if a last out, tae mebbe write it up because it... at the first meeting, there was... county trustees appointed, all the landlords o the county. Although, one o the Cadells, John Cadell, was on that... what they called the county trustees for the roads under the act o 1750. And the first meeting, they settled... five tollhouses. One at the Berwick border, the next one Linton Brigg east end – that's East Linton – two at Haddington, one at St Lawrence and one at, eh... east end and the fifth one at Ravensheugh Burn, which went tae the sea just where we're sitting at the moment. And the road then was up that brae, right up... till the early nineteenth century because a researched that and a have the date when the final links, firstly from Levenhall tae Wallyford, and the last link was frae Wallyford up tae Dolphingstone, because the original 1750 turnpike road, there was a tollhouse in that corner right in front of us.

0h 16m 28s

And the roads went on tae the raids in 1878 and that tollhouse became the pit manager's residence. And an old friend of mine that lives just a short distance from it lived in that house. And ye can see there, part o that wall that was- that recess was a big kitchen cupboard in that house, but that was originally a tollhouse. But see the steepness o that brae, av learnt it was called Lomond Brae but in all the recent jargon, it was just always called the 'Manager's Brae', and that's a steep, heavy, heavy incline for all the increasing traffic in the industrial revolution, that led tae subsequent act, after act, after act, and finally, as I've already mentioned, it was linked up straight through Musselburgh, Levenhall, Wallyford tae Tranent. But on this- on early days in the Act, up the brae and there was a branch at- across tae Dolphingstone farm and that was tae Tranent and south. But otherwise, that road went- and a can mention and this is an interesting study, or just an interest, for folk in the summer, just tae retrace aw these old highways, find them out.

0h 18m 10s

Because at the top o Pencraig, that'll give me a starting point, and just go- at the top o Pencraig just go due north, aboot thirty, forty yards. Ye'll see the hard bottom o the ancient road and its stuck ontae the present road intae East Linton down from the north o the brae a bit. But there's a wee big history o this corner here. And this is a site not just wi pit history and it's got its eight hundred years but here av given ye a bit o turnpike history and a hope it has given some o yous a new interest because the road systems, it's an absorbing study and a recommend it.

[incomprehensible due to poor sound quality outside]

DS: Do ye no want a picture here? Do ye no want a picture here? We're on the North Berwick road at Preston or Prestonpans but in the old part of the old village of Preston, historic, and this nicely done up plaque here, circle o closes, that was a pit shaft.

UF: Oh.

DS: It's cried the Shrine noo but there's a wee bit history in ma own days in pits because Bankton just on the other side... on the south side o the same road just across there, Bankton pit, and I think it was around 1924... the pithead went on fire... and the greasy winding ropes went on fire and both cages parted and dropped doon the shaft.

0h 20m 22s

And that happened between eight and nine in the morning. Well, the Tranent- the miners had tae [?] but this wee shaft we're looking at, at the Shrine, as it's now called because there was a little ornament here, was a... a handy escape route. It was just purely for air. And the men on the north side o the pit got up that wee shaft. There's a more intriguing story about them on the south side o the workings because they had no route... and just tae the south o Bankton was another shaft, privately owned, though, Bankpark. And the Bankpark management and workers had illegally a breach o the Coalmines Act; they had broken through in Bankton workings and I don't know whether this is certain or not but I heard that the litigation was ending because it was alleged the Bankpark boys had stolen some rails frae the Bankton workings, incredible as that could [laughter]... nowadays but anything in ma young days could happen in pits [laughter].

0h 22m 00s

But the only road these men in the south side... they got up Bankpark pit, it was the only road they could get up. So, of course there was no question o litigation after that [laughter]. So, there's a wee history and that was all Bankton and the whole pithead had tae be rebuilt and all the rest o it. We've... we've just... am sitting looking at 1745, at the junction just approaching Meadowmill, going off the North Berwick road. And tae the... just tae the south o there, that field that we're looking at, pylons, electric pylons defacing and fouling it, almost. The whole- because it's a lovely countryside, a lovely bit o East Lothian. That was the battlefield o Prestonpans. and the old road there just tae the right o me, that bridge, that's part of the old tramline, the 1722 tramline frae the Tranent pits tae Cokenny Harbour. But looking at this monument here, this small reminder o the battle... I was six year in charge o this Wallyford group, it was called: Prestonlinks, Prestongrange and Carberry – frae 1950 tae '56. And nearer the end o ma term, say about 1955 or there, that track, a pipe track, was being dug down through there tae the pit from here.

0h 24m 10s

And they come on a pile o bones and buttons and parts of uniforms... which had obviously been buried the period o the battle. Well, a attended a little service and a hole was dug just behind there and an episcopal minister – now, what is his name? Tall man, he was an FSE, a just forget his name at the moment... and there were reps frae the... regiments, a small group of us, reps from the regiments. And a little service and these fragments o bones and bits o uniforms and buckles are buried behind that stone and a attended that little service. That's St Joseph's... but in ma day, there were Steel's Trust bursaries but George Steel... made his money, he was a native o Tranent, who made his money building the New Town o Edinburgh, the New Town. And he left the trust deed and it was- a just forget the dates now, it was tae... three aims... feed, clothe and educate the poor o Tranent first and then, some other mining villages round about.

0h 26m 12s

And that was built- that was the school. And over the years, there were trustees... but there was a board o trustees set up and the chairman o the trustees was the Old Kirk minister, now, of fifty years, Dr Caesar. And he soon organised... that it wasnae just the poor. He made it and it was small fees and the numbers o the poor was very small and- in relation tae the total numbers, ye see. So, it went on so long that an action was raised, from Tranent and the settlement- and it went- they alleged a breach o the trust deed... but the settlement, there was a settlement made and it agreed that there was a breach but the settlement hardly made any difference. But in any case... the Education Act, which a think was 1872, that altered the whole status of it. And some time... early in the century, the Catholics had it and it's always known as the smart little pipe band and little footballers too, St Joseph's.

0h 28m 14s

So, it's- cause a was raised in Tranent and a- a knew it intimately. So, it's a wee bit o old history, too.

[pause in recording]

DS: -was a machine man in the Fleets. Knew him when a was undermanager... and just came off the nightshift. Now, he was cutting a- in a laich, laich seam, just about twenty-four inch thick and he never went home. He came down and threw hissel over that bridge. And that was one of many, many over the century, over the years o ma [?] that they found it a convenient or an awful [?]
[laughter].

Both: *[laughter]*

DS: But a... a... felt a terrible shock at Bobby Dow, a grand worker and all the rest o it. What... coming off the nightshift, he must've had traumatic experiences o some kind. So, these are the awful... bits o tragedies that happened tae-

[pause in recording]

[incomprehensible due to poor sound quality outside]

UF: Ok. Right.

DS: We're on the Tranent-Cockenzie road. On ma right is the entrance tae St Joseph's – and that's a bit o history education wise – but on ma left, there's a manmade... hill or bing here and this is that opencast. Has tae be replaced someday. But on the very site o some bit mining history here, and am looking down on the small burn because just on ma right hand... and a hope when all this opencast is finished... because there, right in there – covered wi weeds, a can't see any of it now – is the entrance tae a day-level and a don't know exactly when it was started but it was in the time o the Setons and they disappeared in the 1715 rebellion frae here.

0h 30m 30s

But that led right up, ultimately, that day-level, tae the Fleets pit about two miles away down this side. And at number- there was No. 1, 2 and No. 3 shaft. They followed the outcrops o the coal, ye see, shallow. At No. 3 and 18, 17, Cadell extended that day level right round across the A1, and across the Winton road, round tae near the Fleets pit. And that lasted... till fairly recent days, but that's an old, ancient day level but it was for drainage o the workings, of water, and it's still draining some water yet. But... in the 1920s or thereabout, there was a big fall up there because in ma young days, yes, used tae run full floods o water, draining all these pits. So, this is *[incomprehensible]* just

across frae the entrance tae St Joseph's and a hope they put an exposed entrance tae that when am up in heaven, a presume am about tae go.

[*pause in recording*]

DS: I should mention also that it delivered its water here but from here, along intae the lands o Seton.

0h 32m 06s

That was an open course, on the water, and a remember in ma own days it was run in full flood but ye can see it turning right down there. That is the old burn and it went intae the sea down the lands o Seton along there. And that's the road... the farm now has dug it up.

UF: Mhm.

DS: We're at Tranent Cemetery gates and on oor right... weeds strewn, just a tiny walkin path... is the line o the old tramline from the Tranmare where it is now, in Tranent, tae Cokenny Harbour, and am sure that shoulda been on the schemes o Meadowmill. They should shairly make a nice walkin path for tourists and others. And on ma left, just the same but it's been all ploughed up, but that is still a section making up tae where the Tranmare is which was a- became a coal depot in ma schooldays and the newer pits used tae be on that side. This is not for the tape. [*quietly*] [?] and a said 'Andra', a says, [?] oot the pit here', ye see, 'oh aye', a says but a've tellt them... [?].

Both: [*laughter*]

DS: [*laughter*] Ye ken, at the bloody [?]. Ken, he was always quick. Ken, he had a bit o humour.

UF: [*laughter*]

DS: I said, 'three feet square', a tellt him [*laughter*].

UF: [*laughter*].

0h 34m 00s

DS: Ye see, he [?] [*laughter*].

UF: [*laughter*] Oh dear.

[*pause in recording*]

DS: Had been an ancient lintel in it, had been an ancient wee road- eh, door in or window.

UF: Right, say where ye are.

DS: We're at the foot o The Heugh. Tranent. And there's a water column down there; it used tae run open water frae it at one time... because this was a branch from the day level I've already mentioned. It turned at... a farm at Tranent Mains, turnt right and up The Heugh, and up and drained at Elphinstone pits, the roads- the pits on the Elphinstone road. And just below me here's the big junction. So, this is the bit- and this heugh is a late- I just don't know all the history of it but it's a natural... and there was history of a seam being exposed there and going on fire since about... but now it's... it's mebbe getting a fresh lease o life because it's the Tranent walking road, obviously, from the newly made Meadowmill sports ground, which is just a couple o hundred yards tae the north of us, here. And am at the junction. On ma left's the auld road that I've already mentioned, the only connecting road from Fa'side, from Fa'side leaving tae the south, the ancient road, and on the

right it's part of it and there's a dookit because that's been obviously part o the manse o the auld kirk, because the auld kirk, Tranent Parish Kirk – the only kirk left in Tranent, by the way.

0h 36m 15s

And ma father was an elder o the Wishart Kirk, the only dissenting Kirk at one time between Musselburgh and Haddington. And Davie became an elder too, for a number o years [*laughter*]. But now, the dissenting Wishart Kirk's just a hall now and this- and aw the Tranent folk knew they have that, that lethal long Church Street brae tae walk for their devotions down here and this is the Old Kirk. And there's a link wi Prestongrange because [Moore?] that lost his life, the manager o Prestongrange is buried in there somewhere and... one special feature o that burial is worth mentioning. When they were digging his grave, they landed in the waste o the great seam, and his body's lying in the waste o the great seam [*laughter*]... so, this is another bit o the auld, auld history o Tranent, which is abounding. And just up there – and this is something truly historical and av tried so many different experts on roads – but from down here, and up at the corner, is what we call 'the Backsides'. And right from the top o Tranent, in my young days, we could walk right down and it was only four feet wide, a six feet wall on each side and that was a- obviously, a link tae the same highway as this we're standing at, the auld ancient road tae the south, going down tae Meadowmill and joining the road south.

0h 38m 08s

And that would be for walking and horse ridden passengers... there are fragments of it still left and I'd like that tae be taken- somebody, expert, tae just have a look, there's little fragments. But that was right from what is the Foresters Park and junior's fitba pitch now, right down tae... because here's a confluence. Tranent, Church Street, this old road here and the Backsides all meet at that corner, just where ma car was. So, that confluence is... but am just talking, ye know. There nobody ever listens tae me, that bit o history o Tranent because it... it goes back, the name Tranent goes back right tae Malcolm Canmore, ken. Travernent. But pits of course, history of pits. Now, yer looking there – do ye see the ruin? Yon's Bankton House, Colonel Gardiner fell at the Battle of Prestonpans... fighting on the royalist side. And it was used by that farm, used for seasonal workers just, ye know, latterly. So, that's the fate but there's the shell, the shell, and it's still a strong shell. That's Bankton House and that's another little relic o the Battle o Prestonpans, because he was carried intae this manse here, behind us, and he died actually in this manse... badly wounded at the battle.

UF: What happened to the house that it's a ruin?

DS: It's a ruin.

0h 40m 00s

It just belongs tae the farm now, I think, and that's all. It's an empty ruin, ye see, being that it was burnt down, burnt. But it used tae be these Irish seasonal workers, ye know, who used tae come over for the potatoes and, eh... and the harvesting times and so on. And ye can see just now all the rugby poles. That's the ground o Bankton pit and it's the big bing on the side. That was Edinburgh Collieries central washery which was built 1912 and on the auld tramroad frae Tranent, instead o a narrow tramroad, the wagons o dross came frae the Fleets pit down and got washed in that central washery, there. And the dominant feature now is the Cockenzie Power Station, that tremendous power station, and that's on the side o Prestonlinks pit, which was all Edinburgh Collieries, also, when a had it... and I've been two miles and ye can see a train o opencast coal passing us. Ye see

these wagons? because this huge opencast is all on our right side. And there's a tremendous lot o coal still left under there and there's a big, long, long train load passing, all these tipping wagons or drop-bottom cars.

[pause in recording]

DS: -the wall here, too.

UF: Uhuh.

DS: Ye see? We're at the foot o what... aw the old Tranent folk knows as the Backsides. It's this confluence. I've just come up the Doocot... the Doocot Brae, which is part o the road that leads away tae Fa'side and the roads south and west.

0h 42m 08s

And Church Street, the foot o Church Street's just here too and the Old Kirk just over there. But this is the foot o the Backsides and in ma young days, only four feet wide, high wall on each side, it was almost... claustrophobic but it strikes right up tae the top o Tranent, tae the Foresters Park which is now there and am certain it had links wi roads south, tae Ormiston, Winton, etcetera, etcetera. And it used tae be- but the east side wall's removed and it's open wall noo, just one high dyke on the right side. But ye can imagine a horseman or passenger just walking down this ancient road. And I've mentioned that there's so many so-called authorities, [?] and others, but there's nobody ever tried tae... research or say or interest themselves in it, and tae me it's a bit o the auld, auld town because Tranent's so auld and this is part of it. And it's obviously a obvious communication, the road south tae the main road down here at Meadowmill. There's a [?] just like this one, tae Fa'side that way. This is frae away up tae Pencaitland and so on. So, there's a wee bit o the Backsides and it's used yet, ye can see, but the mystique's away wi this other wall, ye see. And of course, it had other uses, in those young days, ye see, because there was a road intae it at the chemist's halfway up Tranent High Street and across from that chemist, was a part, a narrow road too, cried Lady's Close – and that's- that's not a modern connotation, that's the old, ancient name, Lady's Close.

0h 44m 12s

And just the width o this... and that was... building at the foot o this, was [Waldy's?] office, and the miners got paid there in ma young days when a came tae school. And they were aw sitting on their hunkers and a've read travellers going through Tranent commenting on miners on their hunkers, waiting, eleven-day fortnights, then, paid every second Friday. And the Saturday, of course, idle had tae be, after a fortnight's pay. And it had uses then, of course. Convenient.

[pause in recording]

[incomprehensible due to poor sound quality outside]

DS: *[incomprehensible?]* if I remember. *[incomprehensible?]* houses everywhere here, little miners' houses.

UF: Ahh, yes.

DS: Oh, yes. [?], that's its name, the [?]. Oh, and the Backsides came right down through this. Even auld Edinburgh Colliery Company's houses are now demolished here, in this respect. This used tae be a dairyman's house; it's a- still a respectable house here. And ye can see some o the [?].... and a think we'll gaun roond the Coal Neuk. I'll give ye a wee bit of that... give ye that.

0h 46m 00s

Up here I mentioned the Old Kirk and the Wishart. Well, here, on ma left, is the Wishart Kirk and it's now a hall, after the union, and it's looking very tidy but there's an auld manse belonging tae that in there and a'd like tae know the history o that. And that goes back tae the earliest days when it- a have the date when it was built and the first minister, Reverend R.W. [?], he's buried in... where the crematorium is now at... Seafield, is it? But he's buried in there in Edinburgh. But he was fifty times a- eh, fifty years a minister there. And am going tae go down now through the Coal Neuk... and this is one o the oldest parts o Tranent, the Coal Neuk. Making down Church Street, ontae the ancient road that a've been mentioning, leading away south. And that door there, [Rod Bradley?] used tae live there; he'd a dish-cart, do ye remember the- you would never remember dish-carts used tae come round.

UF: Yes!

DS: Lorries.

UF: Yes!

DS: Well, [?] he'd a dish-cart, he lived in there and that was Watt's Dairy. But see how the [?], aw these ancient bits o of walls are there – but along here, the most ancient bit of all. This is called New Street; that was the new- the news a long, long time-