

Interviewee(s): Jimmy Thompson (JT)	Interviewer(s): Unknown Female (UF)
Date of Interview: ?	Ref: EL2-36-1-1-T
REGION	East Lothian
TOWN	Morrison's Haven

0h 00m 00s

JT: -question sorta style?

UF: When we're about [?].

JT: -tae go out there, right?

UF: Right.

JT: And bring the boats in. I mean, there was what, two or three hundred tonnes on the ships that came in for coal. Ah... I've never sortae made really... any advance on how the rest acquired their boats. I suppose, like everything else, just like a dog, it was a hobby. And loads o these men being joiners, sailmakers – ma old man was on the sailing ships – I mean, nothing was a trouble tae them; everything was made by theirselves. Ok? Now, they decided tae form a club, sailing club, and through the years they sailed North Berwick, Fisherrow, even sailed across tae Kirkcaldy. When they did that, they sailed for mebbe a couple o days. Of course, it would be tae the time o their sortae holiday. Huh. If ye can call it a holiday in these days. This the sortae thing ye want?

UF: Mmhm.

JT: Um... the back end o the year, aw the boats were drawn up on the beach, above the highwater mark. They were stripped first, of course; sails were all put away, masts were stowed away under the piles and the boats were dragged up. They used a sortae... oh dear. Like the pit props?

UF: Mm.

JT: As sortae rollers. Right? And everybody was there, ye know, some pulling the rope, some steadying the boat. Once they got her up, ye scrubbed her deck, ye turned her upside down. Right? Eh, ye also- of course, ye didnae turn her upside down right on the ground; I mean, ye put her on struts tae protect her. And everybody was employed tae scrape the barnacles off the boat [*laughter*]. Right? Even the kids. Then, before the sortae winter set in, ye would tar their bottoms... the ships, a mean [*laughter*].

0h 02m 00s

The boats, ye'd tar aw them. And this was a great thing as kids. We were mucked up frae going wi... what, wi grease and Prestonpans folk tae take the muck off ye. Our mothers werenae very pleased but ach, it was all part and parcel o growing up, wasn't it? Then, they would be covered wi tarpaulins tae protect them. Right? These boats covered wi tarpaulins during the winter months made guid wee hidey-holes for us tae play in, especially if it rained. Ye were sheltered underneath the piles o the harbour, the wooden piles o the harbour but, eh... a mean, if it was heavy, it used tae drip through. So, if ye played hide and seek, anything like that, then ye'd favour it. Of course, everybody knew that. Course ye were chased because a mean, ye could do damage without realising it. Then, when the spring came again, boats were turned the right way up, painted first, of course, left tae dry in the good spring weather, then put back in again tae start all over again. How'd you like that?

UF: And how often did they go out sailing? Was it regular fixtures?

JT: Oh no. I mean, they had their fixtures... their own sort o yachts, their own sort o yacht races. They had their fixtures where they sailed against, as a say, Kirkcaldy, North Berwick and... the mothers, the kids, used tae go down by bus. I remember North Berwick club, that's a memory o mine, treating us tae a sortae tea. Ye know, sortae tinnies like the gally, couple o sandwiches, pie or something like that. Oh yeah, they treated you well. And of course, as everybody knows – well, as loads of people should know – the Forth is a dangerous river. Right? And I mean, it can be rough: you can go out one day, calm as a millpond, within a couple o hours it could blow up. And I always remember an incident in particular when they went there, they brewed up, ye know, made their own stuff; although they were treated, they still... took provisions with them.

0h 04m 06s

Eh... tea made on a Primus stove. So, when they came back one day... oh, ma mother was like a lot more, although ye were sortae... mm, not actually poor but ye didnae have a heck of a lot. She wouldnae stand this... saltiness in the sugar and what have ye. So, there was a load o local worthies in these days, they're tramps, and a'd better no tell ye what one o them was then, just in case, because you're tape recording this [*laughter*]. But this one in particular, he was a nice old fella. And she says tae me, whenever she tasted this stuff, realised the salt was there, yeah, there's old Cold Shoney, we used tae call him. Or Cold Joney – or Shoney. 'Run efter him and gie him that', so there a wis with a sortae half packet o tea, sugar and stuff that was a wee bit salty, and ran after him, and a told him, he dug away deep down intae his pockets – he had aboot five coats on, believe it or no, and that's no exaggeration [*laughter*]. These blokes had... ah, they were the real sortae tramps. And he came out wi a thrupenny bit, a silver thrupenny – ye can imagine what that was tae me, thruppence [*laughter*]! Laddie got thruppence for the pictures; I got thruppence for the midweek! Oh my god, that was a fortune. And he was quite happy. Oh geez, other sortae tramps used tae come, knock at the door, hand in their tinny, the majority o people there filled it up wi tea and they used tae sit there and... they would even gie them a couple o slice o breid. Mebbe very little on it but nobody was sortae turned away, cause these people wouldnae do ye any harm, ye know. Of course, the brickwork was the favourite place for them, even in the winter. The parts... eh, that part o the road just where the brickwork was never seemed tae- well, unless there was heavy rain, but snow never seemed tae lie there because o the heat that came frae the brickwork.

0h 06m 00s

Even as kids... em, ye got the hightide coming in tae the pond and at one time, that pond was used as sluice gates. Right? And these sluice gates, believe it or no, according tae ma old man, one o them once worked a wee mill cause water power was great in these days. Well, when the tide came in, hightides, the pond trapped it. In later years, it was just a run away from the pit but this day in particular... the water flying through the sluice and of course, we used tae throw bottles or pieces o wood and watch them going [*making whoosh noise*]. One o the younger lads with us, he fell in. Well, ye know, ye didnae... I mean, ye were... well, for want o another word, trained. Ye know, ye didnae run and panic, ye just went in after him. It wasnae deep tae us but tae him, he coulda been dragged away underneath. So, we dragged him out and of course, we were soaking... over tae the brickwork and we dried up. On the road back home from the brickwork then came a bloody thunderstorm and we got soaked again [*laughter*]. Well, anyway tae cut a long story short, he musta swallowed- I mean some o this water was filthy. Right? I mean, we didnae bother but when ye think o it nowadays, it was. And of course, the fright and the shock the laddie got upset his stomach; o course, he told his mother how he'd fell in and we didnae get a medal, we got a bloody hammering for allowing him intae there [*laughter*]. Right? And yet, tae ma knowledge, in the years a stayed there, there was only one death. Somebody may have told ye about this before but there was only one serious accident o

drowning. This wee laddie went doon fishing one day, slipped, struck his head off of one o the rails that was sticking up in the mud... and that was the only serious accident. One or two o them went out in their boats, their boats capsized but the majority, I think, could swim.

0h 08m 00s

I mean, ma older brothers damn near gave ma mother a heart attack. They used tae dive off a chute right intae the water and one o them in particular, ma middle brother, when he dove in, he used tae swim underneath the water and come up on the other side o the piles and people used tae wonder where he was. Ma older brother, he was part of the Port Seton swimming club and they used tae do a Gala Day. And... there're two or three people may remember this, one o the highlights- he was a beautiful diver. One o his highlights was, as it got darker at night, they lit a hoop. The fire, the fire dive, they used tae call it, and he went off the high dive right through this. Oh, he was good. Eh... today, they'd be in a sortae Olympic team, half o them because a mean everybody had tae learn tae swim – and ye were taught the hard way. Ye were thrown in at the deep end sortae style. There was always plenty o swimmers there tae protect ye, but the idea was that ye stayed next tae the sea, ye had tae learn tae swim, if ye were gonnae play there. So, there ye are, how's that?

UF: The brick pond was the favourite swimming place, was it?

JT: No, it was clarty. I mean, the... in later years, em... there was no sortae toilet facilities, neither in the... there was in the houses but a mean, in the pit, no, not that I know of. There might've been but where the heck they were... but there was one near the brickwork. This was just a spar o wood, where the water used tae run underneath. So, ye can imagine... and yet, when ye got a hightide, this place got cleaned oot. It was still muddy. Of course, the mud and muck came from the sortae beam. The water was pumped out mixed wi different other things. The brickwork pond was a great place for- oh, as kids we made boats out o a piece o wood, bit o tin for a keel, a mast and sailed them across.

0h 10m 08s

Just tae show ye how mucky this place was, many's a time the boat used tae get stuck. The wee sortae boat, ye know? And we'd walk out tae get it: afore ye knew it, ye were up tae- ye were up past the blinking knees in muck [*laughter*]. Ye had tae be hauled out! Also... aw, there were loads o tips round the place. Eh... it's comical when a think o it. Some o the stuff that was tipped over there is worth a fortune the day, like yon old brass lamps. Well, we found a brass lamp and polished it up – this was our cup for winning the race [*laughter*]. Although... a may be talking about this in sortae nostalgia... eh, Molly Weir's book. She talks a lot about that, as well, ye know?

UF: Mmhm.

JT: She talks about her schooldays and how they went tae the pictures and reconstructed the thing. We did the same. Back to the sortae pit again, there was a... a gum bing. That was small, small drossy coal that was used for the fires, for the steam, because the pit was all worked wi steam. And oh, this gum bing was big. So, when we saw a picture about the desert, the gum bing was our desert. But many's a moonlight night, the shadows cast by the sortae dip, or the height, ye misjudged it and down ye went in the gum and if it had been wet or even bone-dry, ye were covered frae head tae foot. Prestonpans salt was a good seller in these days [*laughter*]. Ye were scrubbed frae head tae foot. Ah... what else can a tell ye?

UF: What about the Gala Days? Or Cuthill?

JT: Oh, these were the miners' Gala Days, in Cuthill. Oh, these were great days for us.

0h 12m 00s

Um... the thing that brought back the memory tae loads o people o the Gala Day, was that program *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*, with the actor that did the... what do ye call it? The Indian. And round his turban, he'd a snake belt, what we term a snake belt. Right? That was the clasp, the snake. Well, when it came a Gala Day, ye were given white socks, sandals... of course, when a think o the kids today and look at them, ye don't see many kids running about in short trousers now but we did, until ye practically left the school – unless it was a pair o overalls or something like that. But aw the kids in ma day wore short trousers. So, ye got beautiful white trousers, nice white shirt, a tinny. Right? A tinny for your tea and it was tied wi a piece o tape and of course your belt. The belt wi the snake [laughter]. I've often looked for some o them, I don't know if they're still in vogue yet. And down ye went, wi your ticket. Course, all miners got a ticket. Even ma wife can remember the day she came down in the tramcar because although her people stayed in Musselburgh, her father worked in Prestongrange Colliery, so she was entitled tae come tae the Gala as well. Well, ye formed up and the local band marched ye round the streets and intae the park. In the park, as ye walked intae the park, ye handed over your ticket and ye were given your bag o buns, which mebbe consisted o a pie... it was the Co-operative that always supplied aw this, and of course your tinny. Ye went up tae the big urns and got your tea. In the Gala Days, ye ran... there were races for different ages. I believe ye got, what was it, a ha'penny or a penny or maybe a stick o rock or something for trying. Ye got something anyway. Em... there was hardly a day past that somebody wasnae sick [laughter].

0h 14m 02s

But these things were family gatherings; everybody was there. The band played, they had the old men's race, young men's race... ye had everything. Then of course, we went home, aw that stuff was aw taken off and put away tae the next year [laughter]. It was the same when ye came home from the school: ye were stripped off, put intae mebbe a pair o dungarees. Dungarees, a think, were the favourite until a moleskin type o trouser came out. I remember one lady there, she had the sortae-she sold them. She bought them in bulk, then sold them. They were hardwearing. Miners used tae wear them. Ma other- another recollection o ma childhood days, the house a stayed in in the miners' row, had two windaes, wi only one in the room. The reason being that that ma father being pilot could have a full view o the Forth. Right? Any ship, for instance, which was coming frae Leith, they could see it and any ship that was coming frae anywhere else, they could see it. O course, they knew wi the colliery, colliery being- harbour being private tae the colliery, and they ships coming in for coal, they knew exactly, near enough, when they ships would arrive. And as a said, because o these two windaes, many's a night used tae lie there in the room bed and mind, of course, there was no streetlights in ma day. There was eventually in nineteen... the late 1930s, when we went from paraffin tae electricity. But the miners coming down that road, ye could watch the shadows o the lamps, frae one window tae the other, going round and round and round. I mean, loads o people talk about counting sheep. I used tae watch them and just drop off [laughter]. Ye can imagine the type o thing, ye know: ye hear their voices, hear the clamp o their boots, cause there was no pit baths, either.

0h 16m 00s

Uh, the baths was a sortae godsend, so was the transport, when the buses started tae run. Mm, what else?

UF: Well, what was life in your house like? What sort of house had you?

JT: Ma house? Ah dear. Em... as a- a don't know if a told ye before but we were once discussing- it wasnae so bad when a was born but in the older days, as a said, when the- there was an outside lavatory – and a real outside lavatory: no running water and a midden, tae dump your stuff in. Just a room and kitchen. So, ye can imagine ye had tae draw your water frae somewhere. Your water came out a well but when a began tae grow up, they built a sortae scullery and a bathroom. But we were talking about this one day, doon at the beam engine when somebody said 'ye know, it musta been lovely', somebody that really didnae know the sortae hardships. This old fella turned round and said 'don't kid yoursel, hen, a miner's always the worst thing they ever built'. It was the bare necessities. Of course, as a started tae grow up- well, what a mean by 'growing up' tae ma recollection five, six, seven year old, the sculleries and bathrooms were put on but it was still a walk through. Right? As ye opened the door, your bathroom was tae your left and then there was a scullery. Ye walked right intae it. Straight through intae a wee sortae four feet by four feet lobby sortae style, no much bigger, intae the sortae living room-cum-bedroom and intae the other back bedroom. Eh, all coal fires, of course. But as a say, as ye went in that door, there was a boiler fire and although, we got a concessionary coal frae the colliery, as kids we still had tae go down the beach and gether the wee churls, washed up, cause they tipped it over the bing. And this was a biler fire for Monday morning's wash.

0h 18m 00s

And the beauty o that was it ran direct right intae the bath. So, in later years- it was a great thing too, on a cold winter's day, put on the biler fire and the whole house was heated. But one o ma greatest recollections or nice memories, as a say, we'd a wee fire in the other bedroom too, just a small one because the main yin in the sortae living room-cum-bedroom was cooking, a range, more like a range. Ye got mince wi soot, sausages wi soot and everything wi soot [*laughter*].

Both: [*laughter*]

JT: Ah yeah, but when it was the winter months and ye used tae take a shovel full o coal frae the main range and take it right through and put it in the wee fire, in the room. Oh, the smell o that – ye can even smell it yet sortae style, ye ken. And this was the goods. Even in later years, when we had visitors, they aw used tae like the main room sortae style. A think the reason being the fact that the two windows, as a said before, I mean, we had a view from Morrison's Haven right tae west Pans, Musselburgh, Leith and right doon the Fife coast, through these two windows. Another great thing was when we were kids and it was mebbe too cold a day... em, the shipping in the Forth, the yachts in the Forth, the old man's telescope oot the room windae. He would allow ye it for about- this was a wee special treat ye got. I've still got that telescope, by the way. It's a wee bit, eh... tatty now because a think a lost one or two o the lenses. Now, what else?

UF: Great, we'll talk about the wonderful community life there was in Morrison's Haven?

JT: Ah, well like everywhere else... fair enough there was, the same as there was, eh... I mean, I won't exaggerate Morrison's Haven tae anywhere else. The same as there was in any sortae wee village ye would get but at the same time, ye've got tae go tae the fact that although everybody helped, everybody also knew your business.

0h 20m 10s

So, there was nae wee secrets sortae style. Aw no, everybody helped. I mean, unlike today, these sortae days are gone. Even where a stay today and a stay in a sortae cul-de-sac, with about six- there's what, six, twelve, eighteen, twenty-four houses. Although I know everybody by sight, I don't

know everybody by name. But even today, that's what, thirty years on frae Morrison's Haven, a could still recite tae ye every person that stayed there. Now, when a went tae Canada last year for a holiday, a went tae the north o north Vancouver Island and it was just a poky wee place. Ma nephew turns around and says tae me 'no, we'll have tae take ye away tae Vancouver and Banff and the Rockies, ye'd get bored here' and a said 'don't kid yersel, a was born in a place like this'. I mean, even there... there ye had, as a say, the scullery and all. Well, the scullery in some o the wee places was a wee shop. Em... one o the blokes, as a matter o fact, Councillor Patton's- Paton. Councillor Paton's father, he had a wee sortae business, ye know, selling vegetables, things like that. That's the sortae Bay City Rollers man.

UF: Mm.

JT: His son, the Bay City Rollers' manager. And even in the house- and another wifey, she had that. The other bloke, he did the haircutting [*laughter*]. O course, at the pit, when he... he took over the wee place at the pit and made that intae a wee shop. And this was as good as anything. I mean... for us tae go tae Edinburgh, that was a treat. I mean, although ye could see Edinburgh, Edinburgh was a treat for ye tae go there. And yet, uh, I cannae mind whae was the organiser o this, at the school, when it came the school holidays, a can mind o getting a sheet and ye tore strips off it... it was done in wee strips and every strip entitled ye tae a free ride on somewhere on Portobello shores.

0h 22m 16s

UF: Oh.

JT: Did naebody ever tell ye that yin? Did they no? A remember that. And things ye didnae like, ye exchanged wi somebody else, ye know, like one a wasnae very keen on was the... the figure eight railway. It didnae look very safe tae me [*laughter*]. But oh aye, we used tae get that. And the school, ye walked. And many's a time... always been a lover o nature. O course, we had aw different things, ye know, like when ye played your games o boules, when ye played rounders and in the spring o the year, when ye went birdnesting. O course, going down tae school 'oh, we found another nest', 'oh, let's see where it is'. Time, time meant nothing until ye got tae the school, ten minutes late. Six o the belt for being late [*laughter*]. But even so, ye forgot about that because all that interested ye was going home. Like I remember once, on a holiday in Mallorca... and a was out talking tae some friends and the wife and her pals were sitting in the lounge o the hotel, 'where've you been?'. A says 'Effie, am gonnae tell ye the same as a used tae tell ma mother years ago when she used tae ask me that when a was an hoor late coming hame frae the schuil, 'where've ye been?' and the simple answer was 'oot' [*laughter*]. A bet thousands o people have said that. No? Do you no- oh, you're younger, of course. What about you? When your mother asked you where you'd been?

[*pause in recording*]

UF: -after the war, wasn't it, that the miners, they sort of started building the other houses and moved people out of the Haven? Is that right?

JT: No, before the war.

UF: Before the war.

JT: Before the war aw those big housing schemes started. Em... and this was- this was to do with overcrowding.

0h 24m 02s

UT: Uhuh.

JT: I mean, they were kidding themselves when they talked about overcrowding, as a told ye... some o the families there had a football team and two reserves. A came frae a family o seven. A mean, the majority had big families. Well, you can imagine, as I said before, about these type o houses. Room and kitchen, two beds in the sortae recess – although, I’ll say one thing about these beds: they were a damn sight warmer, by god, then some o the stuff we’ve got the day. When ye were bielled on three sides: your feet, your head and one side. Oh, and... big heavy curtains. I can remember even there’s- used tae be a family down there, and she used tae charge ye a ha’penny, and they had this sortae bed taken out when the mother and father were away out, and they used tae put on a concert party [*laughter*]. And this was the screens, used tae do a wee bit o singing. Oh, they were great places tae hide under.