

Sent in wi' the big lads



**The Memories of Usworth-born miner,
JIM TATTERS 1921 to 2013**

Washington History Society



Introduction

Jim Tatters was born in 1921 and raised in Usworth Colliery, County Durham, one of the several mining villages in the Washington district, at the heart of the Durham coalfield. There were still many farms in the area, but in the previous century coal-mining had become the predominant industry. Jim left school at fourteen years of age to work at the local pit, Usworth Colliery, and later moved to Calverton pit in Nottinghamshire where he spent the rest of coal-mining career. He married Josie Appleby in 1943 and had two daughters; Joan and Christine.

In 2012 he started recording his vivid memories of growing up in Usworth with retired teacher John Suggett, also born in Usworth Colliery, who had moved to Nottinghamshire in 1984. Jim had gone to school with John's mother, and had worked with John's father at Usworth pit in the 1930s and 1940s, and helped John settle in Nottinghamshire.

What follows is based mainly on transcriptions of recordings made in March and April of 2012 when Jim was in his 91st year. It is **not** a definitive history of the Usworth and Washington areas, but the personal recollections of one man growing up and living there from the 1920s to the 1950s. An unedited version is available on the North East Labour History website <https://nelh.net/oral-history/oral-history-trades-unions/oral-history-trades-unions-jim-tatters/>

After moving to Calverton to work in a developing pit, Jim frequently visited family and friends in his 'home' area, and was highly critical of the New Town destroying many of the buildings in the Usworth area.

Despite living in Calverton for over fifty years, Jim retained his dialect. This was not so surprising, however, since many of the miners who came to work in Calverton were from the county of Durham, and their dialects can be heard throughout the village. Indeed, the village workingmens' club to this day known as 'The Geordie Club'.

Durham miners left their homes in quite large numbers during the 1950s and 1960s and the Nottinghamshire villages of Ollerton and Cotgrave have sizeable communities of ex- Durham people. Other Washington and Usworth miners left to work in other midland at about the same time.

John has retained the Durham dialogue in these transcriptions rather than 'translate' them into Standard English. The glossary at the back lists dialect words and sayings.

The format is a dialogue between John and Jim, with John's *questions and comments in italics* and explanations in *[squared brackets]*, illustrated by the excellent sketches of John Suggett and images sourced by the Washington History Society.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Sheila Suggett for her valiant efforts and rescue work whilst tutoring John's faltering efforts with a computer.

Thanks also to Colin Rutter, Shirley Roddham and Sheila Suggett for their encouragement.

Images sources include Washington History Society and www.raggyspelk.co.uk

John Suggett

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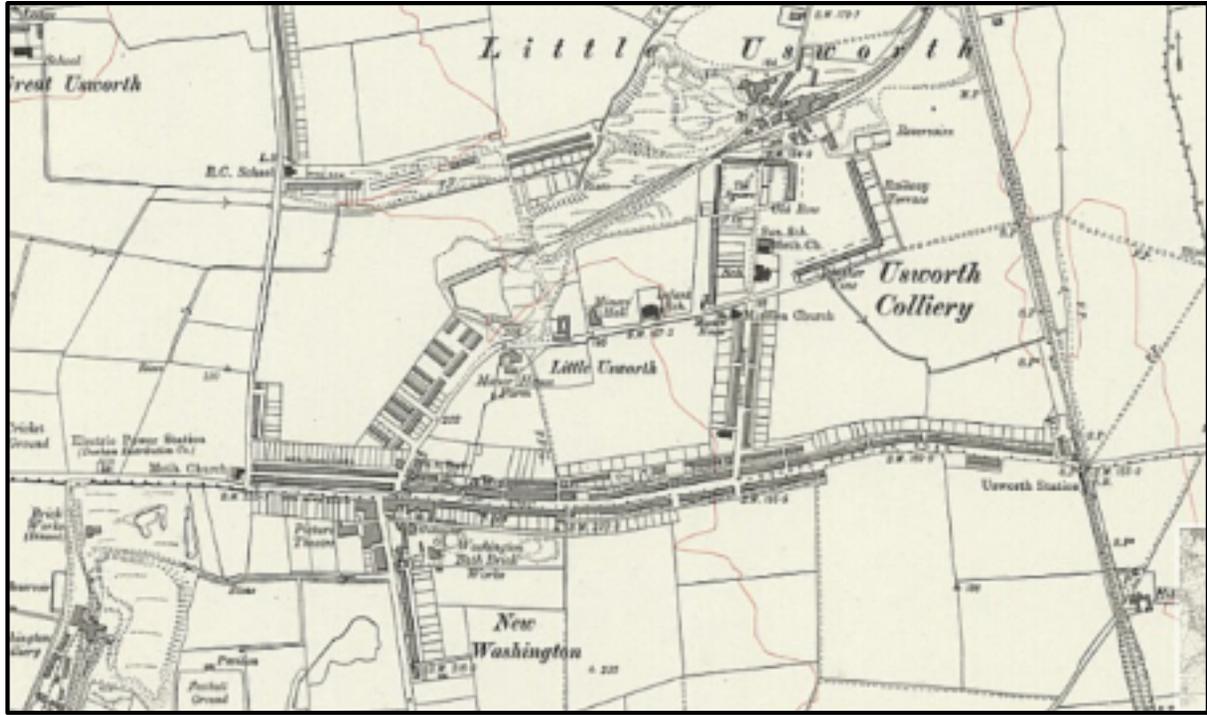


Figure 1: Usworth Colliery 1914

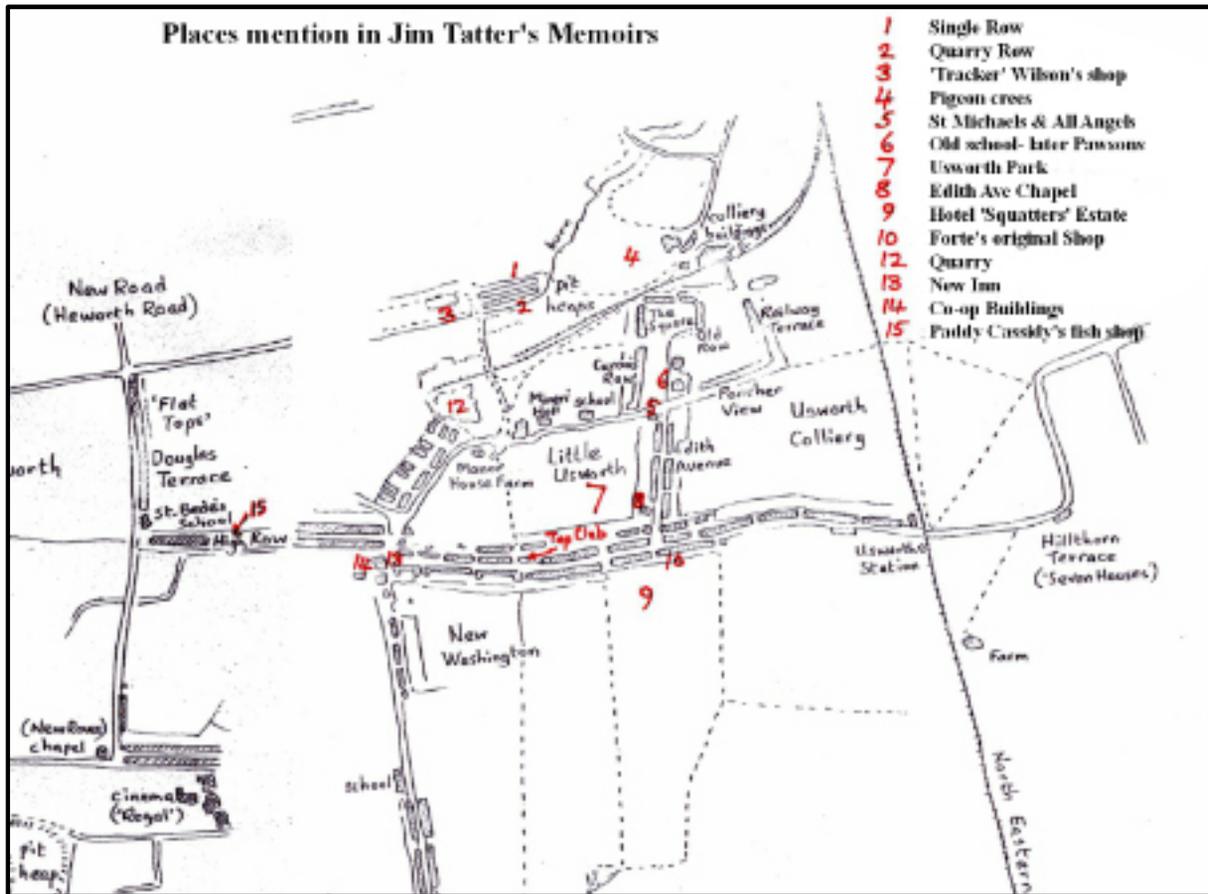


Figure 2: Places mentioned in Jim Tatters Memoirs

Early Years

Jim, will you tell me where and when you were born, and what you remember of your family growing up in Usworth?

Well, we were a family of five. There was three lads and two lasses in our family and there's only me and the baby of the family, Sadie, left. She married a local lad who was a fitter at Usworth Colliery, so we were full-blown Usworth Colliery people.

Now, we were born in the top house near Edith Avenue Chapel. I can remember as a toddler coming out of our backyard, 'cos we were the very end house, and there was an entrance into the park there and that was our garden. And I can remember we used to keep pigs at the top, and the street used to arlwas have a feed one weekend when the pig-killer used to come on the Frida. Lotsa cryin', 'cos the' were pets of ours, and the' used t' try to keep wuh away from them while the pig-killer come. Then it was cut up and delivered to the streets where they'd had an order in for a pound of back or the pig's foot an' aal that.

But I can remember it had railins round that chapel and trees at the front on Edith Avenue. I can remember as a toddler climbin' up on those railins.



Figure 3: Edith Avenue showing chapel

So, how old would you be then?

I remember things when I was about three or four years old.

I remember gannin up to Ralphie Richardson's sweet shop on the crossroads at the top end of Edith Avenue.

There was the Station Road which went down to Usworth Station and, er, that's where we went.

A cobbler's, an Italian ice -cream shop called Forte, and Ralphie Richardson's. Somebody carld Moore had a butcher's shop and then there was Jimmy Nesbitt's. Jimmy Nesbitt had an off-licence, but also, he had a lorry and he would move furniture. It was a reg'lar in those days. We didn't get posh vans to move, we just chucked iverything in the lorry.

Were you born in that house?

I was born in number 68 Edith Avenue and so was me kid sister.

I was born in 1921. As aa've heard, it was right in the middle of a pit strike. Very cold and, er, hardship aal round us.

Aa'd go up to Washington to the shops...a very busy place, with the usual shops...Medda (Meadow) Dairy, Maypole, Brough's, Duncan's....Er, local business man, he had several shops, he had a jeweller's, plus, across the road he had a children's clothes and things like that....the' carld him Jones!

Then there was a doctor's there...no comparison to today's doctors or practices. But, anyhow....

Was your dad a pitman?

He was at Usworth. He went down Usworth pit. He started when he was twelve years old, in 1899.

It was a very old pit, yuh knaa. It was sunk in 1845 time...and where the brickyard used to be....that was Usworth Square. There were streets of houses there and on to Coxon's Row.

Can you remember houses there?

I can't remember houses there but I remember the brickyard coming after the '26 [1926] strike.

Now, I used to sit wi me dad and them wira bottle of watter while they were diggin wira riddle and shovel and the muck on the shovel was hittin the riddle and the coal seemed to separate itself from the dirt. Coal! That's what the' were diggin for. And for years and years later on, if ever you went over the pit heap, it looked like a battlefield where the shell-burst had been. The' was holes aal ower the place.

Now, when aa was born, when aa started t' tek notice o' things, aa could still remember our garden, and it was taken from us for to make an entrance to the park. That part of the park was like a sorta rough field with footbarl posts in and swings an'that, near the bottom end near the school. Then yuh went through into the footbarl pitch and the bowlin greens and the tennis courts, etcetera.

So, as far back as you can remember, that football pitch and tennis courts were there?

Oh, aam tarkin about before the' came because wuh used t' play in that field before it became the playin field.

If you remember, you probably....if you went to school you used to cut through that chapel and you'd go down a path down the side of that play park. Out at the gate near the boss's house and then you'd go into the school there. Even our Joan [Jim's *elder daughter*] went there like that. You remember the boss's house?

Jim shows a photograph taken when he was about four years old. The boss's house [i.e. the colliery manager's house] is in the background.

Next to that there was the bank manager's house and, a faint [*in the background*] pit heap what used to have some water tanks on the top, like boilers.

The photo was taken in the year before the land was taken over by the Usworth Miners' Welfare.Park. It was opened in 1926.

The New Town pinched half of it and that area is built on now.

There are no Usworth Colliery schools there.

They weren't there 'til 1929. But the infants' was.

Is that where you went?

Aa started at the infants'. Miss Forsyth was me first teacher I can remember.....Miss Fothergill....then there was Miss Siddle, she lived in Ellen Terrace.

One of the biggest things aa remember is, arlwas with your ma.

In those days, unlike the kids of today, your father and mother was at home when you came home from school and yuh went out wi' them when the' went walkin.

It was the terrible scenes of men that came from the war.....

About three year afore aa was born. *[He's talking about the 1914-18 war!]*

When aa was about five or six, it started to register wiris.....one arm....one leg.....coughin.... gas!

There was no welfare in those days, John, no welfare state.

Woe betide yuh if yuh fell off a tree or got hit wira bicycle or the cars as they were in them days.

Me dad had a stoppage at the pit *[the pit was closed down for a time]*, and, in later years, before aa came down t' Nottingham, for several years aa was the representative for the Victoria Hospital.

This was pre-1948 when the National Health Service started.

This is an example of how we survived medically.

Yuh had a stoppage at the pit, so Usworth men, there was about 1200 or 1400 men had thripence or sixpence stoppage each week *[i.e. 3d or 6d kept from their pay]* that went to a central fund that covered yuh in the doctor's and the infirmary.

So, if yuh iver had t' have t' get your tonsils out or anything like that in those days, you were covered by this contribution that the colliery was doin.

And wuh had our own pit amb'lance for accidents at the pit, of course. The' used t' garage it at Usworth Hall. Aa remember goin down wi' Matt Gregory....he was a surface worker but he was always at hand in case there was an urgent need for the amb'lance to take somebody to the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The worst of it was, seeing these men who had come from the war....and with no welfare state in them days....it was no work, no eat!

So there was a lot of sympathy from them that had a job. There was no ifs or buts about it....the' had a reasonable reason why the' just couldn't go to work....wi' one leg.....or one arm.... .coughin the' heart out. And the' used t' be kept wi' the others.

Same as in our houses. We kept our grandparents.....they didn't get put in homes, they lived their lives out, me grandparents.

My grandparents on me mother's side....she had three daughters....they lived at High Row. *[Jim alludes to the attention the daughter gave the parents much as his daughters do to Jim and his wife, Josie. Their daughter, Joan, was at their home doing housework at the time we were recording].*

Number 5....it's still there!

Iverytime aa pass by aa look up at that garden, across at that road, where thi' dad had 'es pigeon cree!

And your house would be rented?

The' were colliery houses.

Edith Avenue was a rented house.

And then wuh went down to Seven Houses which the proper name is Hillthorn Terrace. Wuh lived in number 6 in about the '30s [1930s].

Then we moved to a colliery house, one up, one down about 1930.

Mother was terrible. Wuh moved from there up to Douglas Terrace facing the entrance where the Catholic Church is now on Coach Road Estate, just along from the shop. There was a little shop on the end.....and had several years there.

Aa started work from there at fourteen.

School Life

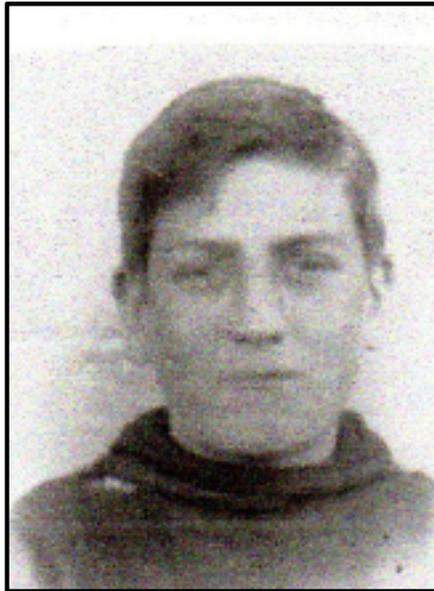


Figure 4: Jim Tatters aged 12

Tell me about your early memories at school.

Aa seemed to move fast through the infants' which was standing on its own. Down past the boss's house to the crossroads of Edith Avenue, near St. Michael's Church, was what was called 'the old school'.

Was that the building that became Pawson's?

Pawson's, that's right! I was in there and aa still wasn't old enough when the school was built around the infants'.....the juniors' and the seniors'.

That was 1929, aa think, when they were built. And for a few months aa had t' remain back at the infants' school at the top end of the classrooms and then aa eventually moved into the juniors'.....and Arthur Morris was me teacher.

So, as you recall, were you able to read from an early age?

Yes. Wuh did well. I arlwas think back that the teachers, from passing through the infants' and into the juniors' and seniors', were brilliant! The teachers.....yuh were frightened of them, but yuh realised what the' were doin.

It was a necessity. And we learned a lot.

Many a time aa've been 'picked up', "Where did yuh learn that? Who towld yuh that?"

Was there much reading in your house? Were there books at home?

Wey, wuh had t' bring homework home but, also.....aa made use of the library in Washington Village for certain books....which the teachers used to advise yuh were worth reading.

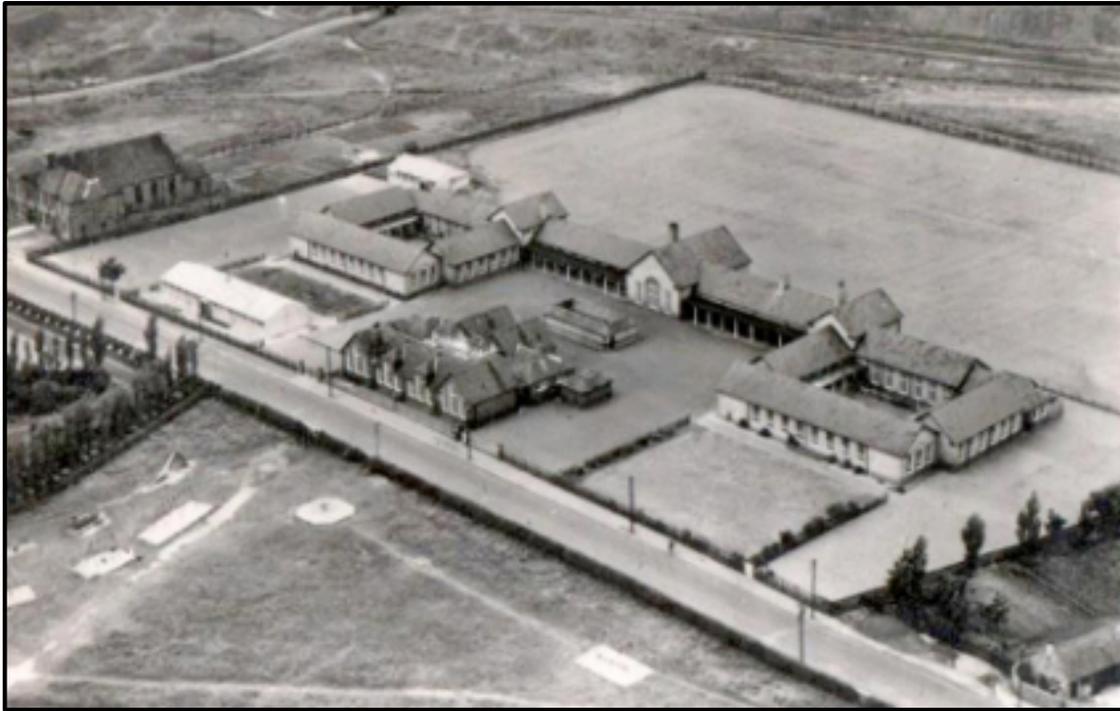


Figure 5: Usworth Colliery Schools

Was that when you were in secondary school?

Not secondary. Aa was never in the secondary. It was Usworth intermediate, juniors and seniors.

In the seniors', there was 'A' classes, 'B' classes, and 'C' classes. The 'Cs' were the 'duckeggs'.

It was a certain defence that yuh had, that yuh didn't want to go to the secondary school, cos yuh were wanted for work!

And our house was desperate for breadwinners.

And the effort wasn't there.

Aa did pass exams but not t' go into secondary school.

So, aa passed through there in the 'A' classes arl the way up 'til aa left school.

Aa learnt woodwork and science.

Frida efternoons was dance day....which was an unusual thing for school.

But wuh were arl kept A1, eleven to twelve years old, A1 boys, fifty of yuh. Yuh went up the next year to A2 boys, fifty of yus. And thirteen to fourteen, yuh left school.

So, what about this dance? What kind of dance was it?

Waltz and, em....the dances of that partic'lar era, the '20s, yuh knaa. Not up to Charleston or things like that....but predominantly waltz.

You were aware of a secondary school. Was that what became known as the grammar school?

Yes. We sat exams for it.

We had a tendency to see them in their uniforms. We sort of thought they were a cut above us and arl this and that.

Did you know of anyone who went there?

Odd ones aa did, yeh. Aye! But it meant that, if yuh did go there, yuh would'n be workin.

The law of the pit village wasyou were wanted for work! You were a pit person, yuh knaa worra mean?

So all of your friends, as it were, would go the same route?

Aye....we arl went t' work!

Aa remember a man comin from a higher place....whether it was Durham Education or government.....and he asked wuh questions like that.... And, "What are you going to do when you leave school?" "Gan t' the pit."He was almost cryin when he knew what wuh were arl gannin to – the pit.

He was aware that there wasn' much ambition of further education leadin to a, mebbes, more salubrious type of job or work, yuh see? Scientist...or doctor....or schoolteacher....things like that.

It was never there among our owlder generations either.

Aa had a very good set o' parents but that part of it was.....

Oor John....if he'd been today'John wason the point of being a cripple there [*Jim points to the photograph referred to previously*].

He had measles and then started to mis-shape on his right side.....and me mother took him to school in a push chair ivery day....and there was no...nothing in the welfare state...you got nothing.

He had to be brought up....he had to be clothed....he had to be bathed.....I used to shave him.

Some of the lads fell oot wi' me when aa moved t' Nottingham, yuh knaa! The' said I'd left 'im!

He died in later years next to J. Lawson, retired M.P. for Chester- le- Street....next beds together at Chester-le- Street Hospital. It was like a workhouse type of hospital.

So, our John was a handicap in that respect, yuh see.

Aa took 'im t' the pictures....wheelchair. Aa once took 'im down t' Seaburn in 'is wheelchair.

What.....,pushed him?

Aye. [*Jim chuckles*]

He used t' arlwas sit outside.....he was well-known outside on the step on the avenue.

But nowadays they overcome a lot of that.

And some of your school experiences....certainly you recall some of your poetry, don't you?

Aye! Well, as aa say, the teachers was marvellous.

I remember the Elliott sisters....they lived near the Glebe pit....Glebe Terrace?...they were very good.

One lady used to come from Sheriff Hill....very few lived local.

The woodwork teacher was Mr. Eels.

Mr. Binney was the science teacher.

And there was a Hilton lived on Wellbank Road.....Jimmy Hilton.

Always....we were.....disciplined.....with support from home....to the teachers.

In other words, if one gave you a clip across the ear, it was no good goin home and tellin yuh father...yuh knaa, cos he'd had a word wirim.....me father would say, "Sort im out!"

And that was an unwritten thing....and the' did.

So it was no good comin home and sayin, "Aa've been hit wi' the teacher the day"....."Yuh musta done somethin wrang then", or summat like that.

Somehow or other, the homework that yuh brought.....yuh knew yuh had t' do it....for the next day gannin back....that had t' be done.

Poetry was arlwas a big thing, yuh knaa. *[Jim recites some of the poetry he learned as a child]*



Figure 6: Jim on 'Rudge-Whitworth' bike

What did you do as hobbies and pastimes when you were growing up, and what games did you play?

Well, there was a pit pond and wuh used t' gan fishin for the tiddlers there wira worm on a bit string...thread....

And we used t' go down to the river....which was dangerous.....down Smithy's way....and cinema.....was Satta afternoons when wuh were kids.....at the Regal.....or, the 'gaff'. It was carld the 'gaff'.....King's picture house as well.

There was walkin.....many a time with me parents, walkin.

Me dad had a sister lived in Boldon Colliery so we used t' walk down there, round East House, Strother House....and come inta Boldon.

How far would you say that would be?

A round trip of, sayten mile, I would of thought.

And that was a regular thing, walking?

Interesting thing I heard on the telly last week. Julia Bradbury [a BBC presenter] was around the Keswick area, and she was on about the German tin miners....working on licence by.....Queen Elizabeth the first....and it arl clicks wi' me fam'ly comin down....Richard Tatters, he was there....he came as a miner of tin and copper....before he went t' the pits.

That was where?

Well, the' moved into the coal mines when the industrial revolution demanded coal for steam raisin'....1800s.

And was that Whitehaven?

Whitehaven....left the Pennines then went into West Yorkshire and Derbyshire, then Nottingham. The' came down into Durham from the Pennines....the' were nearly arl Cumberland....but they were originally Germans, according to a man in Keswick talkin t' Julia Bradbury. She went into some o' these mines which had access from the hillsides.

That's the origination of my Tatters family....the 15 t' 1600s.

So, did you play with 'boolers' and stuff like that...in the back streets....did you play football?

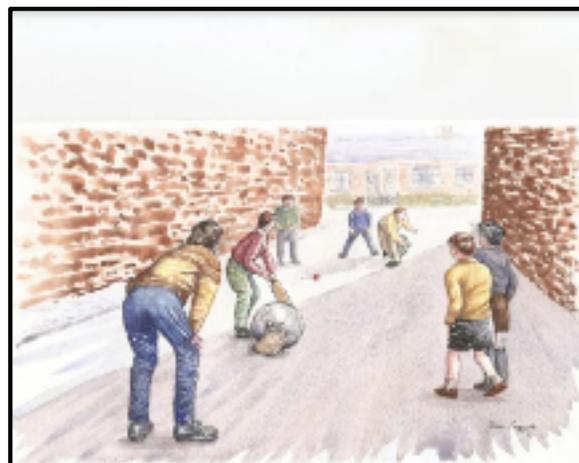


Figure 7: Street football and cricket

What else did you get up to?

Home-made wheels....bicycle wheels....four wheels on a box....like a sledge with four wheels on.

What did you call them? We called them 'bogeys'.

Aye, that would be the word....bogey.

But we used t' hev tyres as well as.....there was a special type of hoop that the' made at the pit blacksmith's, yuh knaa. It was a circular piece of round ...steel. It would stand about two foot six [two feet six inches]...and it would hev a hook t' run with.....the' carld it a 'girth'....and we would tear roond wi them.

Then wuh used t' gan on the pit heap, yuh knaa...and wuh used t' hev a sheet o' corrugated iron wi' the front bent up....the' were kept bent up wi the holes wuh put in, wi' big knots in rope that would come through the holes and pull up. It used t' tek t' the air sometimes when yuh come doon the pit heaps.

And wuh used t' find a lorra stuff on the pit heaps.....as the' were tippin bits o' wood...we'd mek boats....

And shot- firin wire...that was a handy thing t' find. It would mek these Chinese ships....

And then wuh would race wi Meppo tins from that bridge comin doon from....on the Heworth Road where the burn used t' cross the Don?.....well, it wasn't really the Don, it was a well somewhere up in High Usworth. It fed with water pumped out of Washington Pit.....it was dead watter!

Wuh used t' chuck them in and folla them down.....if it got stuck yuh could throw a stone at them t' get them on the move again but yuh couldn't touch them! Yuh had t' get them away.....and wuh used t' finish off reet away down Waterloo. Arl the way down.....aye!

Marbles was a big game. The ring with arl the marbles or glass alleys.....

Yuh knaa, wuh would mek things go accordin t' the seasons.....the' was different things in the season....

When yuh went t' school after the Christmas holidas....lookin along the horizon t' the next holidas...there was one little faint thing....it was half-day....pancake Tuesday...that's arl there was til yuh got t' Easter! Aye!

An' Easter was hard-boiled eggs.

Aal yuh aunts on yuh father's side and on yuh mother's side, yuh grandparents,.....aal had different coloured hard-boiled eggs....so yuh had a lot.

Wuh used t' be chuckin them about and wuh used t' gamble wi them!....What the' carld 'jarpin'. Aye! Your turn t' strike the egg,if yuh bashed it, turn it round,if yuh bashed it again it was your egg.....you'd won that!

Yuh either had a pile o' eggs aside yuh or yuh had nowt!

Footbarl....

Wuh arlwas played footbarl, yuh knaa. The footbarl field was that in front o' Don Gardens where your father had is pigeon crees. That's where wuh played footbarl.

More reg'lar there than anywhere else. Between the dipo [*coal depot*] and Single Row.

Did you have a proper ball?

Aye, but the barl in them days was laced in leather. The' were cruel when yuh headed...it hit yuh reet on the lace. [*Jim chuckles*]

But your education continued, didn't it?

How did you get involved in using the Welfare?

The Miners' Harl [*Hall*] had a lovely set-up for arl it was built in the 1890s.

It had a readin room.....and, once again, there was two or three far-seeing leaders....

Aa remember them now.....Durhams and Hanns and Drummonds. Yuh knaa Don Drummond, his dad?

They had books....cos one was financial secretary of the local union branch [*NUM*] which had its office in the Miners' Hall.

So, yuh had daily papers come in, mornin papers and weekly books and monthly issues, and aa used t' use them books a lot.



Living in Colliery Houses

Shirley Roddham (maiden name, Nevins) was telling me about a visit she made to Beamish Museum where, whilst visiting some miners' cottages, she overheard some people saying, "Isn't it quaint? Isn't it nice? Wouldn't it have been nice to live in a place like this?"

*Shirley said to me, "John, I got angry, and I couldn't hold my tongue because I **had lived in a place like that!**"*

So, she'd said, "It looks nice, but do you realise you had to go outside and across a yard to get to the toilet which, in winter, might be frozen up? And get the coal in from outside. And you came into the living room on a morning, put the light on, and the floor would be covered with 'black-clocks' [cockroaches]."

Did you have any experience of that?

Oh, yes!!

The whole street....crammed wi them!

Aa used t' sit in front o' the fire....Yuh knaa the family used t' sit in a half-circle in front o' the fire. Pullin yuh chairs up after meals an' that.

Mam might be ironin....The table was always in the middle o' the room.....big, square table!

An' she'd either hev a board and a rollin pin, or mekkin the bread, or she'd be ironin. An' she used t' use a iron what yuh put on the fire in them days, yuh know. Not electric irons. Wuh didn' hev electric in Single Row.Wuh just had oil lamps.

And these cockroaches were there.....horrible!

Yuh knaa, the Co-op would give yuh a big almanac that yuh put up in, like a recess, in the room.

An' aa was sittin there this partic'lar day an aa says, "Mother, the' summat makin that paper crinkle."

It was pinned on the wall, yuh see.

She says, "Whey, if yuh pull it down, if there's anything, it'll run away when it drops onto the floor."

Aa says, "Aa knaa that!"

Aa says, "Can aa hev a len [end] o' yuh rowlin pin?"

How old would you be at this time?

Aa was about ten or eleven!

So, imagine that's our fire. *[Jim demonstrates with a rolled-up map how he rolled the rolling-pin down the wall over the paper almanac]*

God! Yuh should o' seen them! Hundreds o' them! Livin behind this paper. Nice an' warm, yuh knaa.

Burif yuh didn' he' them, yuh got them from next door!

The' were horrible things yuh had t' purup with!

A lot o' them houses originally were built of stone from the quarry.

Now, stone-built houses....the' was arlwas cracks an' crevices where roughly built, hewn blocks of real stone are used....the' can get arl ower. [*the cockroaches*]

The' were arlwas there!

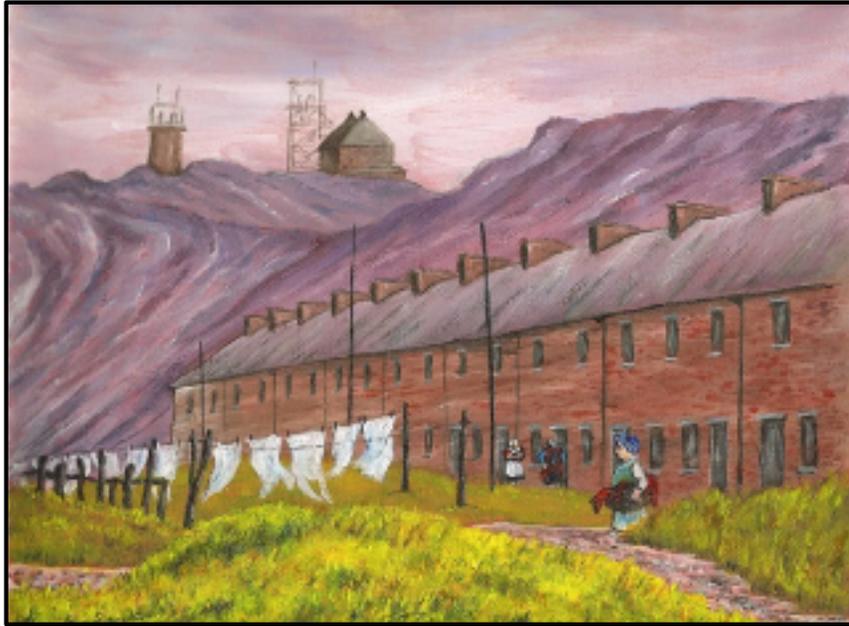


Figure 8: Usworth Colliery Housing and Pit

But, when you went back to Single Row, after Hostel Estate, you would have electric lighting then.

Wuh had electric lights, yes.

Aa can remember the electric lights comin.

We, innocently, were flyin a kite. An' the kite dropped on the wires....against Paddy Cassidy's fish an' chip shop.

When wuh pulled the kite, the wires came together and, "Poof!" Ieverything was blacked out. [Jim laughs]

It caused a birof another thing, yuh knaa....

"Yuh knaa John Suggett? 'E lives farther down! 'E disn' hev 25 watt bulbs on. 'Es got 60s!"

"60s?"

"Honest!"

"Geraway! 60s?"

"Aa knaa somebody what's gorra hundred watt!"

"Never! Ph.....Aa wonder who the' think the' are?"

Arl this went on, yuh knaa. Aye!

Cos it was penny-in-the-slot.

Yuh had t' he' some pennies for when yuh meter dropped. Aye!

And houses could be very cold. People sitting in front of the fire being warm on their fronts but cold on their backs.

When yuh saw women at the shops, the' legs were mottled. Sittin in front o' the fire.

Yuh used t' use brokken clothes pegs cos the' med good wedges t' stop the windas rattlin in the wind.

Did you make proggy mats and clippy mats?

Yes. Wuh arl did that. That was a big thing!

Get the mat frames out an' stretch the first part o' the rowl, an' then we arl sat around....

An' the excitement o' that, yuh knaa, was, the lady of the house would mek toffee.

So, you went and helped other people to make mats in their houses?

Oh, aye!

An', "Fetch yuh progger wi yuh!"

The mats were lovely when the' were new but, after the'd been warked on, and hevin things spilled on them, the' weren't so nice then.

The' used t' mek them out o' old clothes, yuh know.

Yuh could sit hours cuttin strips from blankets an' old clothes.

Aa bet yuh couldn' find a one o' them proggers now!

My parents made mats but I have no experience of going to help other people make their mats. I can, however, remember my dad making toffee before we went to the King's picture house.

How sticky it was depended on how long he'd allowed it to set before going to the pictures.

It certainly kept us quiet whilst the films were on!

Aye!

Ancient days!

Outdoor Netties

You were telling me about the outdoor netties in Single Row.

Well, it was a rough sort of situation, yuh knaa.

The lavatories had t' be cleaned out.....this was under the administration of the council.

An' the' were big, owld-fashioned, two-wheeled carts pulled by big horses.

Each street, generally, had a back yard which yuh crossed t' go to the coal-house or the lavatory.

Everybody was on coal fires an' the ashes was tipped into this square 'well' which had a seat on where yuh sat t' do yuh business.

And, outside, it reg'lar intervals, the cart came round an' the man shovelled the mixture of the burnt out remains of coal....ashes....and human waste.....intiv 'es cart.

Then the' used t' tip it on the fields.

If you ever walked past Waterloo, to May Shaw's East House Farm....there was a sidin on the railway line, an' trucks used t' come out from Newcastle an' Gateshead....an' the farmer used t' back 'is cart underneath.....an' get the same rubbish.

But it arl went on the fields.

An' yuh found yersel walkin across fields an' yuh were walkin amang it.....on yuh shoes, yuh knaa!

And what's the story about going to those outside lavatories, or netties, when there was snow on the ground?

Oh yes.

Well, it was at Single Row where you had to walk up a bank t' the top.....a dirt track.....where the coal-houses and toilets were there.

An' 'e was a character....'e lived with 'is sister an' her husband... 'E arlwas.....which a lot of miners did....drownded his sorras ara weekend.

And it was a winter's Satterda efternoon. And 'eed come in 'the worse for wear' from the club.

An' 'e gorimsel t' bed t' lie down.....an' the arl had white tops an' long pants, yuh knaa....linins.

An' 'e 'ad t' run up....as fast as 'e could t' the toilet.

And, er, little urchins as we were.....nothing against the man....just looked an ideal situation where we were ganna hev a bira fun here.

An' wuh were busy rollin snow inta a big barl....an' it was buildin up.

So, the door opened outwards.....so wuh rolled our big thing again the door....an' then hung back amang the sheds.

Cos the' was also hen sheds up there, an' duck sheds.

And, er, 'e was shoutin an' squealin....an' it was bitter cold, yuh knaa.

The' had t' come an' get the thing away.

But wuh arl gora a good tarkin-to about it!

Me dad had ducks, yuh knaa.

An' 'e used t' let them out in a mornin, an' 'e used t' come from the pit, six o'clock in the mornin, at the end of 'is night shift.....cos that's when most o' the stone was moved.....where the coal had been taken away and an overhang was left, and it had to be fired down and the roadway advanced.

'E would let them out as he came, black, from work, cos the' was no baths then.....

Was this at Edith Avenue?

Nor! Single Row!

And, up at the top, aside the coal-houses an' toilets, the' was space fort' build a....the terminology in Usworth was.....a 'cree'.

And 'e 'ad these ducks.

And, yuh know, the'd go down in single file, arl the way down that top road 'til the' got t' where the burn is....an' the' would spend arl the *day there, an', it tea-time, the'd arl come back up.*
Tea-time! Aye!

Without having to go and fetch them?

Yuh didn' hev t' fetch them. When it was time t' come home....the' would come up in Indian file again, yuh knaa, like that!

An' some o' them was droppin off at different houses, yuh see.

Out and About In the Washington District

Using the book, 'The People's History, Around Washington', by Stuart Miller and George Nairn, 1988, John asked Jim to talk about some of the photographs. Most of the pictures stirred memories of events past and the pictures proved to be only starting points.

Hunter's bus (known locally as The Looey bus)

Now Hunters arlwas lived in Johnson Terrace.....on the main road to Usworth Station which was a very busy station when aa was a young lad in the '20s and '30s.

It [*the station*] could pour off its workers at tea-time yuh know.

Often yuh could see some beautiful trains what was on excursion from Darlington or the southern railways or the Great Western.....beautiful trains at weekends.

But that's getting away from it!

Hunter's frontage was the shop. But, if yuh went round the back, there was the garage. And the two brothers [*Jackie and Tommy*] used t' work very hard and the' could see there was a possibility of a route the 'big buses', as we knew them, the Northern and the blue buses [*Sunderland District Omnibus*] didn't use - from Waterloo to Waterside. And it was a very handy little bus.

It accommodated a lot before the pithead baths at Usworth was opened.

Pit lads would geron what lived at Washington Station – aal the way down there.....Hunter's bus was handy for them. It was handy for the people of Waterloo which was practically a little village, isolated, north of the colliery village. The bus was always a cause of humour among Usworth people.

The Hunter brothers used t' mek yuh laugh, the funny things they'd get up to.

The' used t' crowd the bus sometimes.

The bus seats were med of strips, yuh knaa. There was no comfort in them whatever.

He used t' pile them onta that bus.....crikey!



Figure 9: The Looey Bus

John travelled on Hunter's bus when hewas working at the chemical works and living at Albert Terrace in the early 1960s. He would get on at Thompson's Red Stamp Stores which was at the junction of Station Road and Edith Avenue.

The Waterside, Washington Staithes, was a very ancient place.

My mother was born on the house near the bridge that they've now built, which is near what was the ferryman's house. A lot of people started their married lives in that area in the pre- First World War days.

There was a notorious big building down there called Walkers Buildings.

Nobody had any money and it was a place where many started their married lives.....found rooms there.....not lodges. The' had their own privacy in rooms the way the house was built.

That was somewhere near the iron footbridge in those days.

There was quite a lot of houses there yuh know.

And when was that?

Oh, the early 1900s.

What happened was ...down at the staithes it was very busy with boats coming up the river. My mother can remember a boat coming up as far as the Victoria Bridge, and the' were turnin it round with only a couple of feet at the bow and the stern as it turned round on the river.

Was that a sort of pleasure boat or.....?

It was a boat that would carry coal.

Most of it went down with the keels [*keelboats*] but, historically, the keels came up with the tide, and there was arlwas help at hand at some places where there was difficulty in the movement with the tide comin in.....if he had a face wind!

People at South Hylton used t' be waitin....for t' pick up a few coppers towing them up there.

There was a ferry at South Hylton, yuh know. Where the new bridge is now....bridge over the A19 road.

The' used t' hold a day.....we used t' go down at a weekend and one o' the principal entertainments was the greasy pole. This pole was set off a ship pointing out t' the middle of the river. And it was greased. The prize was on the end of the pole, about fifteen feet long, and it used to be fun seein them getting nearly there then just droppin in t' the water.

Yuh had to be a good swimmer, John!

But to get back to the staithes, yuh know.....the' was that much activity in the days....when midland people would tell yuh about their canals dying with the coming of the railway.

That's what did it for the River Wear. Railways came and the coal trade turned its attention to moving its coal by rail.

There was big staithes, yuh know, opposite the Stadium of Light, where Wearmouth pit was. There was tremendous activity shipping coal out of the Wear from there. Coal from the Lambton, Hetton and Joicey collieries which was the biggest coal company in Durham.

Did you ever travel on Hunter's bus?

Yes, many a time.It arlwas used t' stand at Waterloo at the bridge.

There was Bridge Street, Cross Street and Pump Row. Like a big square in the middle it formed.

The' were arl colliery houses belongin to Usworth pit.

It picked up miners at the colliery and all the way up through Washington, down to Washington Village and then round Glebe Crescent, then down past where the Glebe cinema was and straight down t' Washington Chemicals and then on to virtually the river side.

And I remember it used to take schoolchildren and drop them off at the Village for St. Joseph's.

All that went on, yes.

See, Usworth Colliery had a tremendous number of colliery houses and also, it was said.....it had a lot of people from Ireland, pre- the Irish Republic. The Irish were entitled to work in the UK and they came. They were Roman Catholics and wanted their children in their own school.... and quite a lot of them lived in Waterloo so their kids were picked up there and dropped off at the Village for the catholic schools.

Hunters arlwas had that in mind....but it was the way he crowded his buses sometimes!

Front Street and the New Inn

When aa remember the New Inn it would be afore aa started school. The thing that used t' fascinate me about the New Inn was the crowds of men who gathered there each mornin.... .from anywhere from ten o' clock 'til about twelve an' then the' would go away for their dinners, get into their pit clothes and go to work for the two o' clock shift.¹

So they'd gone drinking?

No, not drinking. The hours was very strict, drinkin.

It was eleven o'clock in the mornin 'til three. And six o'clock 'til ten. Them was the drinkin hours in them days.

Nor, the lads had'n any money t' drink.

The 'fall-back' rate at the pit, in them days, was seven and six. [*seven shillings and six pence*]

If yuh went t' the pit and your workplace was off that day, you were put onto another job –maybe go to the 'back road' and help wira fall [a collapse of coal or stone]. You would then be on 'flat rate' or 'fall-back' rate.

Seven an' six you'd come home with for that day.

Aa can remember me father hevvin three pounds odd – he was a good, honest worker, he never lost a shift –he was never greedy but he was a reg'lar at work. He was what yuh carl 'a stone man' or 'shifter'. A mover of stones – shift the stones – shifter. It had nothing to do with day shift or night shift!

If there was a farl [*a fall*], the' would shift the farl – shovel it into tubs or stowwin it in the 'ways'.

That was arl – three pounds odd for a week's pay.²

Very hard!

What the' did, aa suppose, was gerrup wi' the bairns, riddy for school – no women worked – very, very few women went out t' work.

¹ The Salvation Army premises were near the New Inn and their band played outside the Inn, The Top Club (see below) and other pubs and clubs in the area.

² Jim explained that miners were paid fortnightly on '**Pay Friday**'. The non-pay Friday was known as '**Baft or Baf Friday**'. This is thought to be a corruption of 'Abaft' - the back half of a ship or the behind; s'behind Friday'.

The bairns left home theirselves to school. If the dad was on day shift he'd a gone t' work about half past five. If the dad was on afternoon shift, he would get up, get dressed, and go for a walk.

An' the New Inn was a meetin place where men talked until it was time for dinner before gannin t' pit.

The New Inn had stone sills under its windas [windows] and they were all curved out where people sharpened knives.

The' arl carried a little pocket knife to cut the baccy [tobacco], yuh knaa.

Jim mentions Anderson's shop which was nearby and where his mother used to 'tick on' their clothes.

There were colliery streets belonging to Washington Colliery nearby and, technically, Washington Miners' Hall, in those days, was in the parish of Usworth. It became a Freemason's Lodge.

Then they got a lovely Welfare Hall built on Spout Lane.

Station Road and Front Street

Looking from the King's picture house towards Usworth Station you'd see Rutter's shop, Oughtred's shop, and Ralphie Richardson's was on the corner. Then there was Rock Terrace, Johnson Terrace, Hodgson Terrace, Gladstone Terrace, and Albert Terrace. Then yuh were at the station.

And Forte, like a lot of Italians, came about 1905 to 1908 and established an ice-cream parlour. [This was on Station Terrace]

And there was a fish and chip shop there and a butcher's.

Was Forte there before he moved up to where he eventually had the billiard hall on Victoria Road?

'E started there, yes. 'E moved up after the Ritz cinema was built.

Near the shop was a way into the Regal cinema and it was called Paddy's Market.

There had been an actual cinema on a square of ground probably where the Co-op buildings on the corner are now.



Figure 10: Front Street

Jim thinks that the original name for the Regal was the Alexandra, and that the other cinema he is talking about was called the Victoria.

In later years, it was adapted as a dance hall on Saddington nights. We'd gan t' dances there but the screen was still in existence.

The Alexandra [or Regal or 'gaff'] used to have concerts on the stage.

Jim recalls the Regal being converted to 'talkies'.

Yuh were towld t' shut up tarkin which was difficult cos everybody read the captions underneath.

Me grandma used t' tek me so aa could read tiv'a cos she could'n read, see. [*When watching silent films*]

Aa used t' write a' thripenny [*three penny*] bets oot for the 'bookie' comin down the street.

Bookies in them days, yuh knaa, the' had t' watch the police. It was illegal to collect bets down the street. But the' came regardless.

When the' got caught and had t' gan t' Gateshead t' be fined – he didn' hev money t' pay the fine but 'the big boys' up above 'im, worre was collectin for, they would pay them.

It was farcical really but ivery body used t' hev a bet.

The police knew the' were there. Yuh could read the p'liceman as the' warked around in them days --- "Oh, aal lerrim 'ev 'is go. Aal pick im up when aa want." Aye!

Aa diven knaa how she studied horses [*studying their racing form*] but: "Write that one down, Jim."

And aa used t' write it – threepence or threepence each way. And the bookies used t' tek them arl the time.

But when wuh used t' gan t' the cinema.....there we were....wuh would be readin like iverybody else. Readin for somebody else.....we'd be readin arl the captions.

So, the sound of voices, accordin t' the picture what yuh looked at on the big screen, voices rose and back again, and there was remarks about the villain, or yuh got : "E's be'ind the door!" "Watch out!"

And somebody would shout: "Shut up! Sit down!"

Me grandma would be addressing the audience. [*Jim is chuckling as he recalls these scenes*]

"Aal not sit down! Aa knaa their kind – aa've met their kind before!"

Aal this was gannin on!

We would read because she couldn't.

Me mam and dad could read and write. They were born in 1887 and 1889.

You would imagine that they would be schoolchildren by 1895, but me father went t' the pit when he was twelve.

The' could manage t' get through readin, mark the pools [*football pools*] which they called 'the tote', or read newspapers. Study horses. And write letters. The' could do arl that, strangely enough.

When yuh had t' be silent, it took some getting used to. People were still tarkin while the' were watchin the film.

The tarkies was on and the bloke used t' hev t' tell them t' shut up'. And it caused aggression. Some would say: "Aam not comin in here any more! Canna tark when you're in there now! Yuh hev t' shut up!"

It was difficult t' get them converted.

Aa can remember the first petrol station. The first petrol filler being at Rutter's – Pratt's Petrol – a famous name –national! Wuh used t' watch them fillin the cars.

One o' the biggest things was when Sun'land was playin at home. Aal west Durham used t' come through Wesh'n'ton t' gan t' Roker Park.

The road down to where the Nissan factory is now used to be bumper to bumper. The' had a fantastic followin, Sunderland. Pre-war.

Did you go to Sunderland?

Wuh used t' get the bus down and wark from the Wheatsheaf up t' the football field.

When did you start going?

Me dad used t' tek is. 'E started is off.

And then we could arl gan when wuh were school lads.

The' used t' hev a special place for us t' gerrin, at the front.

[Jim had difficulty recalling where in the ground he stood but said it was at one side. It seemed to me likely to be what came to be known as The Clock Stand.]

Anyway, we got that we used t' wark sometimes. Arl the way from Usworth. We didn' think owt o' warkin distances then.

Usworth Workingmen's Club- The Top Club

Me father was a founder member there. Aa think it was about 1908 when it opened, Usworth Club.

There was a shop opposite called Bell's -- gentlemen's clothing...ties, suits, shirts.....smashing shop.

Then there was the Stile Inn pub opposite.

The Work'men's Club was well used. It operated well financially.

It used t' tek vast trips to Scarborough, Blackpool.

The' used t' get trains....two trains...it would fill.

At Christmas time there was summat for the bairns.

The members would get so many tokens for beer.

It was a very efficiently run club.



Figure 11: Top Club (left) and Stile Inn (right)

Was it frequented mainly by Usworth men or was it a mixture?

Predominantly Usworth men. The' was Washin'ton men in but they didn't seem to be like Usworth men.

The' would wark up the streets pushin bairns in prams, and things like that yuh knaa.

[Jim's sense of humour is evident in these observations which supposedly disparage Washington Colliery miners]

The' reckon the' used t' wash the dishes at homethings like that.

Usworth men didn't do that?

The women wouldn' let them oot, yuh knaa. The' couldn' come oot like Usworth men.

That's what the' used t' say.

But it had its supply of Washington men, of course.

When yuh were at work, yuh were still tarkin about it yuh knaa. Who was in and what was on the concert last Sunda neet.

The'd get artistes booked yuh knaa and they'd open the show out, like a typical Sudda neet or Sunda neet.....

"Pay the buggers off!" [Jim laughs] And the concert chairman would finally hev t' gerrup and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, can aa have your order for a while? We booked these in all honesty.... .apparently they don't suit you. Aam ganna ask them t' leave. But they will be paid the same as if they had performed in front of you."

Then there would be a few hurrays and clappin o' hands and then 'eed come back again....
."Now, who's goin t' entertain wuh?"

Then the locals used t' come on an' finish off the entertainment with different singers and things like that.

Aye, the' would'n stand anybody who was.....ooohh.....

Why, yuh knaa, the' might wark out the club. "Aam not hevvin this!" And the'd wark oot and gan down the street tiv another pub.

The'd lost their custom. Aye!

The Co-operative Society

Did your family use the Co-op?

Oh, aye! Co-ops will never be forgotten, John.

In the strikes or stoppages....times when things were hard.

I would think the '26 strike.....my parents an' aunts an' uncles, grandparents....the' were arl payin well into the '30s, back t' the Co-op what the Co-op had given them. The '26 strike was a whole year, yuh know. And the' was nothing, absolutely nothing for them.

So, where they able to 'tick on' throughout that period?

The Co-op was the peoples' business. Nobody else's. The' was no private shareholders in the Co-op.

The shareholders were the people....and that was the decision of the people.

I remember a Co-op shop on Edith Avenue. Do you remember that?

Of course. Yes!

I was born in the end house, near the chapel, and aa can remember that bein opened.

Aa should think that that openedit was pre-war.....about 1930.

It was very small, as I recall.

Aye. There was a little shop next door tiv it yuh knaa, but it didn't thrive much when the Co-op came.

It was just a little sort o' shop like.

The Co-op had any amount o' horses....bringin the milk an' groceries an' things like that. It used t' hev stables just around the New Inn corner on the left, facing the butcher's shop.

The' was arlwas plenty o' horse muck on the streets!

One strike Usworth had, the' fetched the pownies [*ponies*] up and the' let arl the pownies loose in a field against Usworth Harl.

And the Co-op horses used t' be taken down there at tea-time ivery night after the'd finished the work. Between fower and five the' used t' let them loose.

Now pit pownies are arl males yuh knaa! And not cut....they're arl there [*not gelded*]. And the' had t' tek the mares oot, the females oot.....the pownies was gannin mad! [*laughter at this memory*]

The' had t' gan round the Co-op horses and put them in another field oot the road. Nobody thought what reaction the pit pownies would hev on them.

Fatfield had two Co-ops.....Chester- le- Street and Birtley and District.

The predominant Co-op in Washington was Birtley. But Newbottle used t' come in and Ryhope and Silksworth used t' come in and Boldon used t' come in'.

Now they would be travellers. What the' did wasthe traveller came Monda or Tuesda, took the order, and it would be delivered parcel to yuh on the Frida.

He'd come arl the way from Ryhope with a four-wheeled cart. Loaded....from Ryhope.....cross the river down at Southwick and up inta Washin'ton. He'd spend 'is day at Usworth and Washin'ton. The parcel delivered....the inhabitant inspected....then the man would come behind for the money....about half an hour later.

Did they charge different prices then, otherwise there wouldn't have been any sense in it?

Well, aa think it was desperation for business. It was good business in them days.

Aa can see them now ...gannin down that Sun'land road....sivven o' clock on a Frida neet.... worn out. The'd been arit aal day!

Of course the' used t' bring the horse's food. The' would hev bags what used t' hang around the horse for it t' feed. The' used t' feed an' watter them.

But Birtley were doin' the same.

The Newbottle one....me mother used t' put me on the bus for t' go t' Newbottle for summat what she'd ordered. She had a membership number.....aa used t' hand them a letter.....

The blue bus [*Sunderland District Omnibuses*] used t' run there. Aa used t' geron when wuh lived at number six Douglas Terrace....

Aa would geroff at Newbottle....the bus carried on down the bank, yon side t' Houghton. An', if aa was slick, aa could nip into the Newbottle stores, which was the head quarters, get what me mother wanted on order, the'd parcel it up....and aa could run back an' catch that bus comin' back. Then back down through Herrington, Shiney Row, Penshaw, Fatfield, up t' Washington Village and back home. That was a trip out for me as a school laddie.

Behind the bus stop at the New Inn was the horses' stables.

Wuh once had a huge gasometer there.

And higher up from that was Chicken Geordie's. They were the big showmen in them days. Aa forgotten their second name.

Forte's shop

Did you ever use Forte's?

Forte's was great for us. When wuh weren't at the pit, wuh were at the pictures.

When wuh come out o' the pictures we used t' gan in Forte's an' play snooker an' billiards.

An' wuh could arlwas hev a nice Oxo....not wirra cube.....aa'm sure it was a liquid.....

It was like a ice-cream parlour. Yuh could have ice-cream if yuh wanted it.

It was nice and warm. Comin out on a cad winter's neet, out o' the picture house, at ha'-past eight, yuh did'n wanta gan yem so soon.....wuh'd arl gather in there.

Yuh had t' behave yersels....which wuh did. No yobs in them days!

Wuh'd play billiards an' snooker. But wuh'd arlwas sit doon an' hev an Oxoand two or three o' them cream crackers.

That was our neet out! Not boozin!



Figure 12: Forte's

Single Row and Quarry Row Area

The pit heap was our playground, John. It was like a battlefield. It was all round holes caused by men diggin in the strike.....'26.

Aa can remember sittin watchin me father an' 'is brothers on the same pit heap and the' had chocked up a big frame.....lyin back.... an' yuh chucked yuh shovel full o' pit rubbish at it. It sorta divided the coal from the stone. A lorra muck went through the grid and it was cast away. But it sorted what coal there was for them. Cos in them days....that's why the' arl took fire...the' was a lot o' coal mixed in wi' the pit waste.

The brickyard thought the' were on a goodun.

Bricks were made of crushed stone.

The' had a preparatory buildin where the bricks were made like clay.

The' used the pit heaps, first of all, the' med that valley between the two [*Jim indicates on a photograph a valley formed in the pit heap*]. The brickyard fetched dirt t' mek the bricks.

But the' didn' estimate this....when the bricks went in the kiln....the little granites [*granules?*] o' coal.....combustion!

When the' got the finished bricks out and the' were cooled down, the' were condemned.

Ultimately, the' had t' import stone in t' keep the brickyard gannin.

We left number thirteen Single Row t' come t' Calverton.



Figure 13: Single Row and Quarry Row

There was another street behind it called Quarry Row. It was called after the famous quarry there.

The owld folks...iverybody tarked about the quarry. It even had a narra house built in it...aa think the' carld the family what used t' be in it...the pub men....Pape!

The' used t' use that water [*from the quarry*]

Usworth Colliery was a steamer.... Before being electric. The' electrified it in 1932.

So, from the pit bein built in 1845 reet up t' 1932, the' was steam.

Aa can remember the pulleys gannin , "Shuh, shuh, shuh...."

The water....but there's different water yuh knaa....trade people would tell yuh there's different waters....and the' was different coals.

And that water that was formed in that quarry was the ideal water for the big boilers t' drive the pit.

So that's why the'd build a house there for a man wira pump t' pump the watter down from the.....

Now that area is still there yit. They've left it like a mound. Along Manor Road from the New Inn....yuh come t' Manor Farm, which is an owld people's place, that's on yer right.

Looking down to where the schools are there was a T-junction which ran down to Quarry Row and the dipo [coal depof] bridge.

Arl that ground on the left was the quarry.

The reason that bridge was built was t' dump pit waste. And it was a considerable deep quarry.

A lot of stone in the locality.....the farm.....next t' the Miners' Harl....the' was a lorra farm area there and the warls were arl stone....an' the pit engine house was stone.

So they filled in the quarry with colliery waste?

When the quarry stopped.....what happened.....it filled wi' water and it couldn' cope....with the water. But there was also a drop in demand.

The' used t' mek millstones. They were sent....besides from buildin houses. The' used t' export millstones.

Another Washington man, Colin Rutter, informed John that stone from the nearby Springwell Quarry has been found in Rome. Apparently that stone was particularly suitable for grinding processes so the ancient Romans started to export it. It would seem likely that the Usworth stone was of a similar quality.

Wuh used t' play in the water known as 'the burn' [it flowed near Quarry Row and Single Row] arl the time.

Wuh fished an' things like that. Wuh used t' dam it an' swim in it.

But wuh arlwas played cowboys an' that on the pit heaps.

Looking at a photograph of two young lads dressed to go to the pit, Jim remarks:

That's very much like us when wuh went t' the pit.

Yuh mam med yuh a bag for t' wear owwer yuh arm....the bait bag!

And what bait would you take?

Jam and bread. Or pease puddin samiches for a treat! [Jim laughs]

Yuh arlwas wore yuh cap like that....yuh tilted it down t' yuh right side, by the way!

Did you?

Aye! Yuh partin was on the left.....yuh partin o' yuh cap.....an' yuh tilted it down that way.

Why was that?

Cos yuh were Usworth!

"Thu's got that the wrang way.....thu's like a puff!" [much laughter]

"Dinnit wearit like that!"

Jim describes how people who dressed 'out of the ordinary' were viewed as being 'strange'. He says:

Yuh daren't gan out wearin summat out o' the ordinary...yuh had t' stick t' yuh uniform. The' were funny that way but the' wouldn' insult yuh!

Usworth Miners' Hall

This was our main place for recreation.

It had a hall yuh could hev dances in. It had a lovely snooker and billiard area. It had a games room...cards and dominoes. It had a reading room with weeklies and monthlies as well as daily papers.

It had a caretaker's house. A fella carld Josh....nobody was Joe....arlwas Josh.....Josh Parr.



When our welfare was built in the '26....[he describes the Welfare Park with bowling greens, tennis courts, a putting green and a football pitch so good that it was sometimes used by Sunderland Football Club for training purposes]

Jim talks about walking.

We used t' gan down by Waterloo, cross the railway line, May Shaw's house, East House, up the road to Strother House, along to Hylton Bridge and then along to the Three Horse Shoes [*public house*]. That was a reg'lar walk.

Another reg'lar wark we had was down t' Washington Village, down over Biddick crossings, down into Fatfield, and along where Butney pit was.

Yuh know how it got named Butney? Botany! If yuh were escapin from the lawyuh could gerra job there. But woe betide yuh if yuh fell out wi' the management.....the'd report yuh t' the police for questionin.

The Last Milers in Washington?

You said that you had the last 'milers' in Washington!

Oh, aye, the milers. [Jim shows, on a map, the location of a stile along Heworth Road (what he called the New Road) and the location of some pigeon crees (or lofts). Pointing to a location, he says: "There was the mile!"]

There was a footpath to Proud's Farm.

That was the exact mile so, when yuh were stannin against yuh pigeon cree, yuh could see the fella wave a big white flag. "They're off!"

And the stop watches used t' be gannin.

Did you have a pigeon cree then?

Aa had in the Avenue [Edith Avenue]. Aa had a pigeon cree there.

Just two milers! But the only reason aa had them.....the' were gonna get the' necks wrung! The' were the la st of the milers.



Figure 15: Allotments and Pigeon Creees

So, when did you start keeping pigeons?

Aa just kept them cos the' were.....that was the last of the milers....it disappeared approximately beginnin o' the war time, 1939.

So you didn't have pigeons before then?

Nor! The' were another world t' the long distance pigeons.

As bairns wuh used t' gan down an' fetch baskets from Usworth Station, what had been returned from.....reet away down t' London. Lang-distance races!

Me dad used to use Usworth Station to have pigeons liberated at Durham and Darlington for 'training tosses'. But they were homing pigeons, not 'milers'. [*Milers were, of course, also homing pigeons-short-distance racers as opposed to long-distance racers.*]

That was a different world t' milers. Milers was a local job. The' didn' keep the others.

The' used t' just skim the fields, yuh knaa, when the' were comin. Yuh could watch them. If yuh were half way between Flat Tops and the stile, what we carld 'the mile'.

How did you come to acquire these two pigeons?

Just through pit ladsworkin tigheter.

The' were ganna scrap them cos the' was nee racin for them now. It was a collapse of the association. It was just a handful o' men that liked a gam'le on a Sadda mornin. Instead o' chuckin pennies up, the' used t' race pigeons.

How many of you had pigeon lofts there? [*This was near Single Row*]

Why, aa can visualise them now.

It was like getting tigheter t' play bowls or quoits. This bunch kept 'miler' pigeons. Aa divven knaa the origination o' milers but the' were very pop'lar at Usworth.

About how many of you were there?

Aa reckon the' was, round the coll'ry, about eight.

Did you keep the two very long?

Aa cannot even remember what happened t' them. Aa never killed them. Aa think aa handed them ower t' somebody....somebody carld an' said, "Aal tek them, Jim."

The lofts had t' be tigheter.....

The' would tek them [the pigeons] on the' bikes, in baskets, or motor bikes.

Your pigeons wouldn't race to your loft, would they?

Of course!

But aa wasn' in the group.....aa only took them cos the' were goin t' be put down, yuh see.

So you never actually raced them?

Aa never raced them.

The' scrapped the crees ower the pit heap. The association may hev fell through, yuh knaa.

[*Jim draws a map to show the location of the crees which were on a piece of land near Single Row*]

Now, if yuh were alang at 'the mile', the stile at Proud's Farm.....yuh could see the pigeon crees, painted red an' white.

As soon as that man released.....the' went.....skimmin.....

So, as far as you know, that finished when the war started?

Aye. It was a group of enthusiasts of people interested in 'milers'.

Some people used t' keep 'high fliers' and 'tumblers'. [these were different types of pigeon.]

That was a Sadda mornin sport, before the' got ready t' gan t' the club between ten an' twelve o'clock.

T' see them fly.....you'd be strollin down the Coach Road from Flat Top ends down t' Usworth Harl....and a one would come over the hedge like that..[*Jim indicates the bird's motion*] rise t' just gan over the hedge....back down....an' straight over t' Single Rar.

I suggest that this kind of racing may have led to the racing of pigeons over longer distances.

The' was prob'ly another instance, yuh knaa....

Money was scarce....wages was disgraceful for miners....and....

"Right , so we' gannin t' Retford next Sadda." [a race from Retford, Nottinghamshire]

"How much will that cost?"

"Well, there's the transport by the railway to get the baskets t' Retford. The's the official who hes t' see them off at that end.....expenses....blah, blah..."

"What's that per head?"

"Well, you'll pay an extra half a dollar." [*half a crown, two shillings and sixpence*] or, a ten bob note [*ten shillings*]

summat like that,yuh knaa.

And that's why the' would say, "Well let's just race amang oursels wi' the milers!"

That was arl bike work....aa've seen them in a powny an' flat wi' baskets on gannin alang....it was a favourite spot that....it was a known mile!

And you could watch them, of course, the whole distance.

Yuh could watch them as the' came, aye.

Did they rattle corn tins?

Aye! Yes.

Keeping Budgies

Efter aa was married, for several years aa was a member of The Budgie Society.

Me an' Jack Cockburn were....wuh had some smashin birds.

Did you show them?

Wuh showed them. We also sowld [sold] them.

Where did the shows take place?

Various places.....the' would arlwas be one at the annual carnival at Usworth Welfare....and yuh had t' tek them t' Newcastle or Sun'land t' see where the real stuff was. Aye!

What colour birds did you keep?

The main budgie was green. Arl the other colours, efter that, the' was 'cross'....so yuh concentration was arlwas on greens.

How many would you have at one time?

Oh, aa used t' have about twenty....in an aviary.

Aa moved the aviary from Hostel Estate t' Single Rar when wuh went there. Aa purit up where the coal-houses an' netties [outside lavatories] used t' be.

But wi' budgies, yuh knaa, the' look interestin flyin around in several.....six or a dozen flyin round...but that was no good to you because yuh didn' knaa who the father was. The' was 'crossin' gannin on. The' were arlwas deein that, budgies. [Jim laughs]

So yuh had t', more or less, keep them in individual places....keep the ladies apart! And when the time came round for matin, so yuh knew who the' were.

How did you get started on keeping budgies?

It was quite easy t' start, John.

It was something that developed after the wah [war] finished.

The' was arlwas a good place at Newcastle, at the Bigg Market, or the Grainger Market, the bird market near there.

The' used t' be a famous shop in Sun'land carld 'The Yella [Yellow] Bird Shop'.

The' were available in shops but the best place was t' get t' know somebody yuh were getin them from. And that's what used t' happen, yuh see.

People would come t' yuh when yuh were partic'lar, and yuh kept them separate.

So, in the Washington area, were there quite a few fellas who kept them?

Well, practically iverybody had a budgie....the' were 'arl the go' [fashionable] at one time.

When yuh were keepin them separate....that was an advancement [advantage ?] for somebody what was studyin wor'e wanted, yuh knaa.

Big boned. The thing on the front o' their...just below the eyes....where the nose yuh knaa....the beak....

I think it was called a wattle.

Yes! Yuh arlwas looked at that and also, what a lot had the' feet in... [Jim uses his hands to show how a bird's feet might be turned inwards] ...like that! That was a tell-tale of a 'cross'....so yuh had t' be partic'lar o' what yuh breedin.

And you kept them until you moved down here, did you?

Aa had t' get rid o' them when aa come down here. Aa nivver bothered efter that.

But aa've been taken by somebody what wanted t' buy a budgie.

"Will tha come an' hev a look wiris, Jim ?"

Cos Alec Wilson used t' tell them : "Jim'll pick a budgie for tha!"

An aa would look for arl the things that a bloke at a show would be lookin for.

Our rings was registered, yuh knaa. When wuh rang the chicks, the' had our number on. So the person yuh sowld it to, you could refer the ring number and...if somethin was happenin.....

The Indoor Cree

Tell me the story of building a cree inside a room in the Hostel Estate house.

Aa wanted this cree, so wharra did, I built the back first. Before aa built any more, aa tried t' get that out the door, which aa could. Aa built it inside the room. Yuh could just gerrin the door.

When aa was satisfied, nuts an' bolts, yuh see... aa rigged it up. An' iverybody used t' come an' look arit.

"Jim, how's tha gonna gerit out?" [*laughter*]

"Aa nivver thowt a' that!" [*he jokes*]

The' used t' look at me.....!

Bu' anyhow.... loosened arl the bolts, dismantled it an' it was.....set up outside.

I moved it to Single Row when wuh went there.

What made you build it inside rather than outside? The weather?

Aa suppose so. Aa had iverything at hand so aa just built it in there.

Joe Gillespie bowt [*bought*] it off 'is afore aa came down here. Lived down Hodgson Terrace but moved t' Single Row.

This cree became an aviary in which Jim kept budgies.



Figure 16: Pigeon Crees

Teenage Years

Well, our teenage years.....workin in the pit.

It was cinema, which was ha'-past six t' ha'past eight....ha'-past eight t' ha'-past ten. So yuh had t' go, if possible, t' the ha'-past six cos...the' were funny shifts at Usworth.....it was three or fower o'clock in the mornin...not civilised six in the mornin.....and, er, yuh priorities was influenced by yuh parents...."Get home, get t' bed cos yuh gorra gerup early. So yuh did, see!

But we'd come out o' the pictures at ha'-past eight and, if wuh had a 'bird' with wuh, we would gan in Forte's.....gera Oxo, biscuits.....an' wuh would play snooker an' that.

Sadda nights....Springwell arlwas had a big dance place.....it was a big, like an ex-army hut, the' carld it the Assembly Rooms, ' the Sem's'.

Wuh used t' come oot o' the pub, yuh knaa....an' gan into 'the Sem's'. Yuh went into the pub for some 'Dutch courage'.*[Jim laughs heartily]* Aye!

The' was a little dance job used t' operate outside St. Michael's and All Angels....the' was a shed there. *[This was at the colliery end of Edith Avenue]* An' Josie used t' come up from Fatfield to it.

An' Washington Welfare was very pop'lar.

An' the Glebe goritself a welfare built an' it started that.

Gallopig home

Comin out o' the matinees when wuh were bairns, yuh knaa, out the Regal....the cowboys'd been on.

The' was arlwas summat about it that med yuh gallop around Manor Road an' stright onto the pit heaps there an' gallop away like bliddy hell. Yuh knaa, re- act the film!

I remember coming home with my friend, Keith Jonas, after watching a cowboy film and galloping all the way home as well.

Aye, wuh did.

Wuh used t' plug the burn up, just below Quarry Row and Single Row.

The' was a river ran through t' the 'plantin'. What we carld 'the plantin'.....plantation.

Wuh used t' plug it up, swim in it, tha knaas. Strip off an' nivver think nowt on it.....naked.

Then somebody'd decide t' pinch yuh clothes.....an' then yuh were runnin up the street.....

Aye.....yuh bugger!

But wuh used t' swim in it, an' that watter was nivver clean, John.

The' used t' swim in Weshin'ton pit pond, where the museum is now....the' was a pit pond there.

We arl learned t' swim in that one.

Was it warm water?

Aye. It used t' come from the winders.

There used to be fish in the pit pond at Usworth apparently.

Usworth had a pond at the end o' Railway Terrace.

Yuh could catch tiddlers in that one.....an' 'salmonies'.

Can yuh remember the 'salmonies'? Aye!

An' wuh knew when it was mushroom time. Wuh knew where the mushrooms were....down Paddy's fields an' that.

Wuh used t' mek our own fun cos the' was no radio of any note. Somebody might be sittin wi earphones on..."Shuh, shuh....." Why that was nee good. Then the loudspeakers come like an' that med it better.

Was food in short supply? There was rationing, obviously.

The' was rationin long before the gover'ment did it for the war. Before '39.

Food was rationed cos yuh didn' hev the money t' buy it.

Aye!

What was your staple diet? Can you remember?

Yes!

Rabbit pie.....cos yuh could catch a rabbit.

Broth. Very pop'lar was broth cos yuh could fetch the leeks an' the carrots an' things out the garden t' mek the broth. Not taties in it like!

An' mam would buy flour....cos the' arlwas baked theirsels....the bread, yuh knaa.

Yuh never saw bought bread. It was arl baked at home.

Them's the things yuh fed on.

The stotty-cyek [*stotty-cake*] would fill yuh. Sharp, if yuh hed stotty...it filled yuh sharp

Did your mam bake stotty?

Aye. Arlwas.

It was what she hed left when she didn' hev any more loaf tins.

It stood at the edge of the fire....a big mound.....an' the dough was risin.

Then she'd purit inta loaf tins, an' purit on the fender, in front o' the big fire....an' then it would start risin in the loaf tins.

But the'd be a dollop left, which the' was no loaf tins for....an' that was the stotty.

She'd fetch it an' purit on a board on the table.....roll it intiv a ring an' then flatten it ontia the oven shelf....an' that came out a stotty.

An' the' were substantial things. The' were just like tyres....lorry wheels.

An' down that Single Row, yuh could walk down the twenty-nine houses.....an, as yuh walked past each door, the' could be one stannin on its edge, coolin down.....an' a dog would come an'.....sweeten it for yuh! [*hearty laughter*].

Aye!

Paddy Cassidy's Fish and Chip Shop

The last time we talked, if you remember, I told you about seeing a television programme showing the building of an Edwardian fish and chip shop at the Beamish Heritage Museum. You mentioned a fish and chip shop near Single Row. Can you tell me about it?

It was just off the bottom of High Row.

There was a path ran up from Single Row and Quarry Row up to High Row. It was just a rough, red ash footpath, Paddy Cassidy's fish and chip shop was about fifty or sixty yards to the pit-side of the bottom house in High Row.

How far was it from Single Row?

Well, it would be a good two or three hundred yards.

Me brother, Bill, used t' get this pony an' flat an' keep the fish an' chips in heated boxes, an' 'e used t' deliver them to the coll'ry.

He had a whistle. Yuh could hear 'im in the dark nights....yuh knew where 'e was at when yuh were walkin anywhere around.

So, he would pick up fish and chips from Paddy Cassidy's.....

The owner of the fish and chip business also had the powny an' flat.

Was it a wooden structure?

Aye! Wood.

It had been built on demolished houses called Double Row.

When you walked down that way, you could see concrete floors and signs of brick walls.

Where did your brother go to deliver?

Well, 'e would 'shoot off' an' 'e would go down Coxon's Row, down into 'the square', which comprised of the back streets of Pensher View, Railway Terrace and Old Rows.

And sometimes I think he ventured along the 'Flat Tops' and along the back street where your house used t' be before yuh came here.

But, also, I think he'd venture down t' Waterloo.

All right. And he had a whistle?

Aye! That's the way the ice-cream man used t' do!

*So, if **you** wanted fish and chips, did you go to the chip shop?*

Wuh went t' the chippy, yes.

How often would your brother deliver?

Well he would set off with fish an' chips in heated boxes.....about seven or eight-ish.

Every night?

Aye!

But we were nearer chip shops where yuh didn' have t' do that...wait for them comin by cart.

'E nivver patronised Edith Avenue cos the' was a good fish an' chip shop at the top of the Avenue, yuh see.

I remember it as Matty Chapman's.

Aye. It was Matty Chapman's. Aa think somebody carld Smith had it when aa was a lad.

So the time we're talking about, it was when you were a lad, then?

Oh yes! This would be 1930-ish.

When did that go, can you remember? When did it finish?

It seemed t' finish when the' built Don Gardens.....about 1932.

Because, if yuh remember, Shillings built a few shops just where there was a little bridge over the burn.

The fish an' chip shop was carld The Electric Fish Shop.

Shillings had a sweet shop, then the' was the chippy. The' carld it the 'lectric chippy cos....where yuh watched them shovellin coal under the range as bairns, this one was electric.

Where did Paddy Cassidy keep his horse?

Whey the' was any amount o' room for them up on the high ground of what had been Middle Row, yuh know.

When yuh walked down the back street of High Row from the New Road, his shop was there and there had been toilets and coal-houses an' pig crees an' iverything like that, an' that's where Paddy used t' keep his powny. Yes!

When aa left t' come here, Paddy was livin next door but one t' me on Single Row. We left number 13 an' Paddy lived in number 15.

Hand- t'- hand fightin

Arl tell yuh what was very fierce.....

When wuh were buildin oor bonfires for bonfire night.

Single Rar an' Quarry Rar had a site for t' bring yuh trees tee.

Yuh knaa wuh were trailin the bliddy trees miles, John. From down the 'plantin' or somewhere like that.

Coxon's Row.....which had a post office....Usworth Post Office.....had been busy buildin their bonfire an'arl...between the back street an' the railins o' the junior school....or where the junior school came in later years....that spare ground.....that's where they put theirs.

Pensher View, Railway Terrace, an' Old Rows would hev theirs in the middle o' that big square.

Waterloo would hev theirs. Flat Tops an' High Row had a place just below the catholic school...the' was a birof a short-cut up the back there....

Now, John, it used t' get fierce.

Yuh gorup one mornin for school, an' yuh bonfire was gone!

An' yuh would see where the'd trailed it.....ower t' Coxon's Row, or somewhere like that, yuh knaa.

Why...."Wuh gorra get that back!"

Whey, the'd be hand-t'-hand fightin!

The owld colliers would be leanin ower the railins wira pipe....."Stop it, yuh buggers! Stop it! Jinny, come an' hev a look at these.....Looka them! The' mean it!"

An' wuh did mean it!

But stone-throwin, that was the most dangerous cos, pit heaps, the' was any amount o' ammunition.

An' the' used t' fight, yuh knaa....the colliery. "Wuh'l gan an' tek the colliery cos they helped an'arl!"

An' the' was pitched battles gannin on before the fifth o' November.

Yuh nivver seen owt like it in yuh life.

Aye. Keep pinchin each other's bonfires.

That continued, you know. I remember that as a lad as well.

It put yuh reet for when the wah started. *[Jim laughs]*

Yuh knaa, the funny thing about it was....yuh were playin footbarl wi them the next day.....on the field.

But that was just another item. Yeah! Aye!

'Tupney' Robson's Tale

What was the story of the man who fell off a cart down your way?

'E was a coll'ry overman at Usworth....an 'e was carld 'Tupney' Robson cos 'e was little. *[the nickname came from twopenny....pronounced tupney in the area....as in a 'tupney piece' coin....tuppence]*

'E was tekkin the horse an' flat to come an' fetch someing *[something]*....as the' would in them days....."Can yuh bring a sideboard, or a bed, down from the Flat Tops t' the Avenue?" Cos 'e would dee it, things like that.

The thing was, there was a little dip ower the bridge, an' then yuh went up a gradient t' the top end o' Quarry Row an' Single Row.

Whey, can yuh remember that shop that 'Tracker' Wilson had?

I can't....but tell me about it. Was that a wooden place as well?

Aye! That was an original back street....runnin up t' High Row. Never made! Pools of water an' holes!

An' 'e was stannin up drivin it up on the tarmacadamed road on t' the point where Single Row an' Quarry Row were. Then 'e had t' turn into this dirt track....mek the best of it.....pick yuh're own way up, yuh see.

Then it would be bouncin.....an' 'e had a bit o' speed on it....an' 'e found his self on 'es back.

On the ground?

The horse an' cart had stopped but he was lyin chucked off the flat, yuh see.

An' Josie happened t' be it the wooden hut shop what used t' be sandwiched between that road an' the pedestrian road in front. And she come tearin down.....and away back up wira blanket.

Aa says, "What's up wi yay?"

She says, "It's 'Tupney'!"

So aa follered up an' the' wuh just bringin 'im round.

Was he alright then?

Aye, 'e was alright.

And had he had a drink?

Aye!

Aa'l tell yuh one thing.....when yuh were follerin 'im down the pit.....on yuh hands an' knees.....it was red hot, yuh knaa....an' it was only two foot high, two foot fower.....and, er, 'e had the nastiest hole there [*Jim indicates a point on his thigh, just below a buttock*].....from the wah! Bullet hole, or shrapnel! Aye!

When the pit-head baths started, eventually, things like that were revealed....in different ones what was in the war....war wounds....aye!

'Tup's' father lived in the first house of Pensher View, an' the' had a lad like my brother....crippled.

An' the'd built a little shelter for 'im, an' arl us young pit lads used t' carl in an' sit round an' keep 'im occupied wi different things, yuh see. A bit natter wirim.

'E was arlwas out there. Aye!

Pit Life

Starting in the Pit

Aa can remember goin down with different lads from that street...what the' carld the Flat Tops, which is now The Pantiles. Then walkin down the back of High Row, Single Row and Quarry Row and over the heaps t' work.

Terrible! Terrible conditions, John!

If yuh imagine Usworth, we were approximately down in that area what we carld 'the pastures'....below Hillthorn Terrace on the way down to the woods....'the dene' we carld it.

Wuh worked in that area.

Walked in...just tub height and tub width.



Figure 17: Walking to the Pit

And you were fourteen then?

Fourteen!

Me birthday was in November and the' spared is 'til the early weeks of the new year...1937 aa think it was.

No trainin!

Just sent in wi' the big lads!

Show 'im what t' do then geron wiris own job.

No electric lamps. Oil lamp that med a circle of about six foot diameter. That's as far as yuh could see...wiran oil lamp.

Woe betide yuh if yuh knocked it out, which was simple!

And the mice!

Oooh! The' took over, the mice did.

But one of the heartbreakin things aa saw, the piece- work where ponies took an empty tub, that was a steel box on railway wheels...narra guage, in tiv a work place...two or three hundred yards away...just tub height and tub width...to see them ponies....the' were very small....and the way the' were badly used in many instances.

The one that worked with the ponies was carld a 'putter'. Some of them were....it was piece-work....and some of them were cruel to the ponies and aa used t' stand there as a school laddie....and yuh knaa aa would tek apples and things like that for them.

The' were supposed t' hev a drinkin box in the little miniature sidin where the full coal tub would come in and stand in one line while the empty tubs was in the other. The' would hook off the full one and onto the empty one at the other side, and back away the' went again to change another man's full tub.

The' had several men to keep goin.

If aa had the chance yuh knaa, I used t' arlwas gi' them somethin t' eat, but the watter was arlwas filthy.

The watter tub did used to come in.....and it used t' be regarded as an interloper.

If yuh set ran wi' six tubs, and one was the watter tub, that was one tub less that the coal was gona come out in, see...

It carried water for the ponies but, when it came in, the' used t' ignore it....turn it from the empty side and purit o nto the full side and gerit away oot wi' the other set.

The haulage was dangerous, very dangerous, John.

Yuh could be in a very low place, walkin up an incline, and the rope was in the middle.

Aal of a sudden it would jump up and hit the roof. As it picked up the weight of the set of tubs below it, yuh see!

Was it frightening as a young lad?

Why, the worst of it was when the' fired shots.

The ventilation was that lax.....yuh were virtually livin in a fog.....practically aal yuh workin hours.

The shift was seven and a half hours.....tek off the travellin time in and out, and five to six hours yuh were in this fog.

It used t' mek yuh cough. It was the fumes of the blastin of the fired shots.

The ventilation was such that it wasn't movin the air away, yuh see!

The ventilation was arlwas very limited....and very gassy too.

See, the intention of ventilation is t' dilute quickly..

A well- ventilated pit.....out on the roads it was, but it had to be split to different districts, yuh see, and it was reduced in its power.

It was a well-known gassy pit.

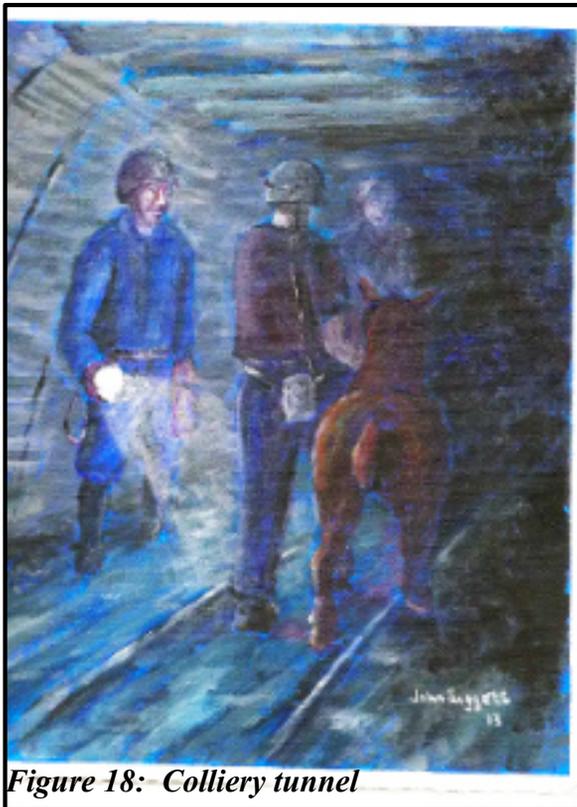


Figure 18: Colliery tunnel

Aa can remember an accident where it was a longwall face and the' were advancin about a hundred yard face and this cavity underneath it, it must have been there for millions of years, as the coal seam was extracted from the coal face, the movement, the pressure forced it up, the gas....and there was two lads gassed that night. One carld Davison.

*[Arthur Leslie Davison was killed on Jim's first day down the pit in 1935- see below.
The two miners who were gassed were:
Adam Atkinson, 05 Apr 1940, aged 30, Filler, accidentally gassed
Alfred Lloyd, 05 Apr 1940, aged 33, Filler, accidentally gassed]'*

How old would you be at that time then?

Aa was in me teens then, or mebbe just early twenties.

Lloyd. He lived opposite the King's [a cinema]. There was two brothers.

And the' only had two 'breathers'. [Jim is referring to breathing apparatus held by the pit rescuers].

And the other lad, Davison, lived down Station Terrace, nearly opposite where you lived.

Aa knew them well. But that's what happened. The gas had come up and the wind was blowin from the main gate up the face half way where the gas was....you could hear it, the' said,.....its journey then was up to the tail gate and out.

Well that was absolutely

Even that brick shaft what yuh see at Usworth, that was stopped there was that much gas comin.

¹ Casualties from Usworth pit as recorded by <http://www.dmm.org.uk/colliery/u003.htm>. During Jim's time at Usworth Pit 13 men were killed between 1935 and 1945, and 2 more after nationalisation up to 1953

A man that played a big part in that was a lad carld Surtees. He was a colliery official and he fetched them out.

But two of them lost their lives. The first day aa went down the pit wuh was aal fetched out because of a fatality. [*Arthur Leslie Davison, 9 Sep 1935, aged 16, Landing Lad, struck by rope*]

Aa can remember quite a lot from them ones.

Joe Shiels – just a young lad in his teens...wrapped [entangled] up in a set. He must have been getting from one side t' the other and it moved away wirim.

By a set, you mean a set of tubs?

Aye, a set of tubs. Haulage.

And there was a putter, carld Dixon. I knew 'im well. Come down an incline, sittin on the limmers [*shafts on pony*] and it tipped over, dropped off the 'way' and tipped over. [*Dixon, John Robert, 29 Apr 1938, aged 23, Putter, crushed*]

And that was his short life.

He lived up past the Gardeners' Club. His younger brother was killed crossin the road to the Gardeners' Club after the New Town started up.



Figure 19: Colliery wagons

And how much would you be paid when you first started? Can you remember?

Oh , it was about fourteen shullin [shillings] a week.

And, in the summer, the drop in the demand for coal, yuh know, the' closed our....the East Pit, which was Barmston, Liberty, Hagues and Victory district.

The' closed them!

It was called the East Pit.

Aa found mesel a job down Sun'land. Ditchburn....he was chairman of Sunderland Football Club at the time when the' won the Cup. [1937]

And aa was there in the period when the' won the Cup!

It was on a street down past Palmer's Arcade.

I was bikin down there Monda, Tuesda, Wensda, Thorsda, Frida, Sadda....half-day Sadda....for six and tenpence ha'penny. [*That's six shillings and tenpence halfpenny*]

And that would be about seven miles would you say?

Aye!

Six and tenpence ha'penny!

And how long were you there?

About a year and then aa come back on account o' the money, cos it was apprentice and yuh were nivver ganna get nowt 'til yuh were twenty-one.

And a lot o' men aa knew were carld up for the war and nivver come back.

Aa knaa two in partic'lar who were at Dunkirk – never came back...

A young lad carld Ken Hutton used t' travel with me. His dad was a dep'ty at the pit.

Aa used t' pick him up down Gladstone Terrace way cos he lived in Ellen Terrace.

He was two or three years younger than me but wuh looked out for each other....and that hit 'im....'es father got killed at Usworth pit. [*Thomas Hutton, 17 Nov 1937, (accident: 15 Nov 1937), aged 43, Deputy, runover by set*]



Figure 20: Hewing coal

Keepin Yersels Alive

It was rather strange that...keepin yerself alive....

Me father was no idle person, an' any chance of getting t' work he did, but, yuh knaa....the' did lose a lorra work.

The owners used t' stop the pit, yuh knaa.....before nationalisation the' just stopped the pit when the' wanted.

In bad weather....if the boats what we relied on....pulled into Bridlington Bay for shelter....plying between London and Tyne Dock.....the' would say...."Ship canna gerin.....so that' it.."

"Well, 'teem-bye'."

"Nor! It'll arl hev t' be shuld [*shovelled*] up again."

You said 'teem-bye'.....do you mean storing coal?

Aye! That's what the' carld it.

The' wouldn' 'teem-bye'.

So, your fatherand his father.....they didn't really have many leisure pursuits because they were always looking to find work?

If aa was off work, the' used t' play hell cos aa was off! An' aa used t' say t' them: "Aa divven loss as much work as thoo.....or when thoo was my age...Thoo was arlwas off wi' the pit bein off."

Usworth even had a system where the' could find work for some in desperation.....The management accepted....the' carld it a rota.....Every eighth week yuh were on the dole.

When was that? What year?

Well, if the' was eight teams of men.....Say yuh were on 'rippin' or 'canch work'....yuh were fower men....one o' them was ganna be off.....[*Jim tries to explain the system but it's difficult to understand*]

Was that so that you always had cover in case.....

No. It was to employ another group.

See, if there was nine fowers of 'canch' men, but the' was only work for eight.....the' med a rota so yuh worked eight weeks then yuh wuh off one.

Did you get paid for the week that you were off?

Yuh were on the 'dole'. Aye! Desperation!

So, from your point of view, nationalisation was a good thing?

Oh, it definitely was. Aye.

What it also brought was miniature hospitals.....first-aid rooms.

Wuh'd nivver heard o' first-aid rooms.

The lamp-cabin man did it for yuh.

Phuuuh.....'E was 'up to the eyes' [covered] in oil an' iverythink.

"What's up?"

"Aa think aa've brokken me arm!"

"Let's hev a look arit."

Purit in splints an' wait for the amb'lance t' tek yuh t' Newcastle t' hospital.

The' were rough times but when the' got the baths.....they eventually had this lovely first-aid job for yuh.

Whey, it did more than that:

"What's up? 'Es the' been lamed? [injured]

"Nor! Aa think aa've put me thumb oot. Aa did it back yem!"

"Whey, keep comin down ivery mornin an' we'll see what's the marra wi' tha."

The'd dee that for tha an' arl, yuh knaa.

They had someone doing first-aid hadn't they?

Well, arl dep'ties hes t' hev a first-aid certif'cate. Aa had mine cos aa was a dep'ty.

An' yuh were virtually like paramedics.

Aa did men wi' nasty injuries.

So I must have got this wrong for some reason. I thought, later on , I'm talking about the '50s, I thought there was a nurse appointed at the pit.

The' was....in the first-aid room. Ken Godfrey was ours.

An' if somebody come up on a stretcher: "Who did that? Who secured that leg?"....cos the'd broke it!

"Er....Jim!"

"Oh well, aam not ganna touch it if Jim did it. Gerim in the amb'lance!"

John suggested to Jim that, had his dad not sustained a serious back injury, his family might have come to Calverton at the same time

Aa'm sure 'e would 'ave been wiris. He was in plaster!

I believe he sustained that injury whilst lifting stone from a trapped workmate following a 'fall'.

That must have happened to a lot of men in those situations.

Jim reads from a leaflet produced to accompany the unveiling of a memorial to the mining community of Washington which was carried out in the Concord / New Inn area on 31st March, 2012.

"Most families in Washington have connections with the pits and the conditions that coal-mining families struggled against in far harder times than those of today. Grinding hard work, low wages, long hours, unsafe working coditions and a lack of job security were normal conditions. Our folk fought through lock-outs, strikes, deadly accidents and disasters for a better life. The friendship and solidarity of the community was central to this life."



Figure 21: Washington Miners' Memorial

We were all in union because we had the main thing in common.....to keep on livin.....strivin for aoh, dear me.

Debt was....oh, yuh knaa....debt went too far wi' some...It caused disturbances an' many a 'far-out' [fall out] wi' individuals. The temptation t' get some more.

Jones had a thrivin pawn shop, yuh know. It was very well worked, that one....at Washington.

Yuh could pawn jewellery, lovely watches...mebbees what yuh great-granddad had...valuable, yuh knaa....and clothin.....People did that, yuh see, in order t' get the' hands on a bit o' money.

Cornish Miners

Jim says that quite a few Cornish men found work at Usworth Colliery. Apparently, they had left Cornwall when there was a slump in the tin-mining industry there¹.

He recollects being on holiday in Mousehole, Cornwall, when, in a pub, a man appeared to be looking intently at Jim. After a while, the chap came to Jim and said (in 'broad Usworth', as Jim put it) that he thought that he knew him.

Jim then recognised the man as being an Usworth miner and replied to him in 'broad Usworth'.

A sign, perhaps, of Jim's pride in being 'an Usworth man'.

¹ Sheila Suggett did find, however, that on the 1901 census, four Cumbrian born men: Knowles, Marshall, Teasdale and Thompson, were residing in the Washington area. Five men born in Cornwall: two Perrys, Barnes, Dunstan and Barres were also living in the area.

Working at Usworth Colliery

Cast your mind back, then, you told me about 'putting' at the pit. But that wasn't your first job was it?

Oh nor, datal work!

The colliery was arl haulage, John.

We goroff [*got out of the 'cage'*] three-quarters down the shaft. What the' carld the East Pit.

But didn't you say you started on 'the screens'?

Only two or three weeks, 'til the' saw what yuh were.

The gaffer would say tiv 'is surface man, "Any lads? Aa want two spare lads." "Aye, aa've got two or three likely lads."

Then the' invited yuh t' come.....wuh weren't forced!

"Fancy gannin down the pit, son?"

"Aye!"

"Right then."

An' that's how yuh started. Yuh were down. The' was nee trainin yuh knaa!

The screens were sorting out....picking out stones from the coal, is that right?

Aye, that's what the screens were.



Figure 22: Going on shift

And then you started down?

Aye. Wuh went down the East Pit. Our district used t' run.....under an area near Hillthorn Terrace.

Arl seams ran deeper as the' went eastwards. So it was gravity.

As they were going towards the coast, they were deepening?

Aye. And the' were arl steel haulage. Thirty tubs used t' be the recognised number for a set of tubs gannin 'in-bye'.

But what would happen would be this.....the coal seams ran down. There was three-quarter, five-quarter, main coal, Maudlin, Low Main, Hutton, Beaumont, and then the bottom one....aa've forgotten what the' carld it.....but it was the main bottom of the shaft.....Busty!

So, there were seven seams were there? Were they all working?

Nor! The' had been. 1845 the' opened.

The' were runnin on gravity [*the tubs*]. The empties would come down an' the' would run down on gravity. The' would gan intiv a sidin where there were thirty fullins waitin.

What seam did you start on?

It was Maudlin.

Not ivery area carld it Maudlin. It was named after a Gateshead name.....Bensham!

Same wi' our Beaumont. Next door at Wash'nton, it was another name.....Harvey!

The same seam of coal went under another name at a different pit?

What was your first job once you'd gone down the pit?

When these empties went down there intiv a big landin, the' would be a haulage engine t' split them into three tens.

And the' had t' be got in t' where the men were workin.

The putters would be comin out wi' fullins , an' when aa had ten fullins, aa would tek the set in, tek the ropes off, and away it went oot t' get t' that big landin.

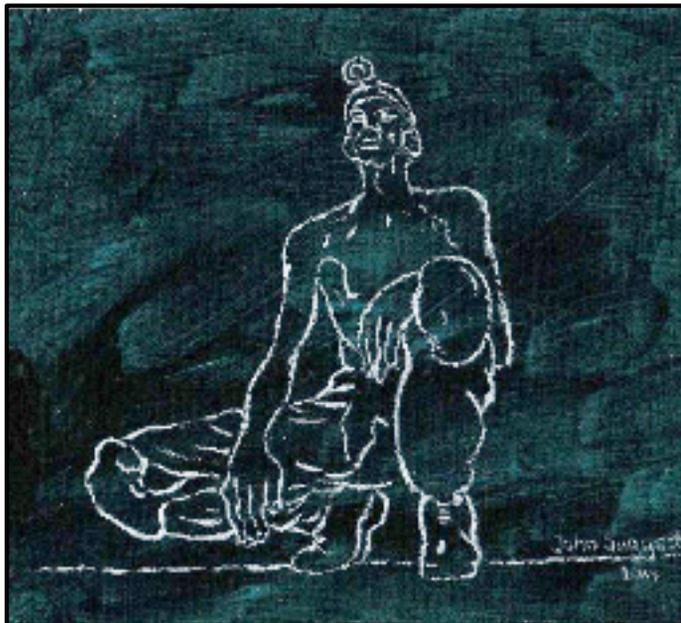


Figure 23: The Dark Pit

Jim was drawing diagrams throughout this time to help me to understand what was going on underground.

So, you were connecting full tubs to the rope to haul the coal out and unhitching empty tubs....

It was very dangerous.....

Aa remember Joe Shields. His district went in the direction of Waterloo. Joe used t' let the tubs gan down there on gravity.

For some reason he'd gone t' the bottom an' 'e got caught in between the wheels and was crushed. He was only a teenager! The' was ever so many teenage kids. [*Joseph Shields, 16 Jun 1936, aged 20, Landing Lad, caught by set, Buried*]

How high was the workplace that you started in?

Wey, where me an' thee father worked, in the Hutton seam, it was two foot fower. [*two feet four inches*]

That was later! But this first job..?

Oh. The'd mek height where there was a landin.

So you could stand up to do this?

When the thirty fullins came in, the' came down an' ran inta here. [*Jim continues to draw!*]

And the' would arlriddy be thirty fullins there. Yuh would tek thee rope off, purit on the fullins an' the tail rope on, an' out they would go. From this little haulage engine which was spliitin these inta tens....the landin lad....

Putters were fetchin full tubs out tub by tub. [*The tubs would be made up into a set of thirty*]

Is that what you were called; landing lad?

Landin lad. Aye. Yuh were dealin wi' haulage ropes arl the time.

You had to have your wits about you all the time!

Aye!

How long did you do that?

Well, aa'd be about nineteen when aa started puttin. That's half-way between the work aa was doin.....

Yuh weren't dropped inta the deep end straight away. Puttin was half-way house.

So yuh were gannin in wi' empty an' comin out wira fullin, yuh see.

The' could be two or three o' yuh puttin in the same little landin wi' the ten tubs.

Yuh'd be sittin on the limmers behind the pony....'es tail was'e didn' hev a flowin tail, it was....oh, it used t' be like sandpaper on yuh showlder, cos 'es tail was cut short.

[Jim describes a situation where two putters would be working in the same landing area and how they had to co-operate to keep their work flowing because they were on 'piece work' (payment by results)]

"two and sevenpece a score....twenty-one tubs..."

He describes the putters coming face-to-face in a narrow section"

That's what was carld 'a yokin'. Somebody had t' give in." [He laughs].

John asked if one of the putters had to go back

"If it was wide enough, yuh rowld [*rolled*] the empty tub off t' let the fullin gan out."

So you'd only take one tub out at a time?

Oh aye, just one tub.

At the start of yuh shift, yuh took empties in.....one for each single man [a man working on his own] and two for the double men [*two men working together*]. The' arl got one each, yuh see.

That would keep you going all day then?

Aye.

Each tub yuh filled had a token on. The hewer had a token an' arl.

When the' arl came t' the surface, the' had t' gan ower a weighbridge, an' the'd be a lad stannin outside the weighbridge, and the youngun would pick it up [*the token*].....it was still secured.... and the token number would be recorded.

When the coal went down and was tipped onto the screens, the' was another lad pickin them up [the tokens] an' puttin them in bunches.

So, did you, as a putter, have a token as well?

Aye, ivery putter had a token.

Sometimes yuh used t' share. Wuh used t' say: "Are wuh hangin up or what?"

The' gorra cavil ivery quarter. Every thirteen weeks aal yuh names went in t' see what districts yuh were gannin intee. Cos some was gooduns an' some was badduns.

So thoo an' me might land in this one....."Are wuh hangin up, John, tigheter?" "Aye!" That meant just get stuck in an' the number o' tubs yuh ' put ' were arl tigheter,see?

How did you progress from 'putting'?

Wey, yuh knaa at the end of a shift.....the'd gan up t' the man there an' 'e would say, "That's it, the end for me, John. This'll be me last un." And out he come. Same wi' the others.

Wuh used t' gan in wi' the empties....like lightnin.....fill some oursels....fill two or three oursels!

That learned yuh t' be a coal-face worker. [*Jim laughs*]

And could you claim?

Wuh had a reco'nised token.

So you went from 'putting' to 'filling'?

Umhuh.

As some filler would probably get injured or had enough or it was rough, "Aam not hevvin this!"

If the' was a vacancy yuh jumped inta it, John!

So you learned by doing it. By seeing other fellas doing it!

Aha! You did it yersel, yuh see.

Jim draws a diagram showing the pit face and the main and tail gates, and how the coal face was advanced', and how the coal was shovelled onto conveyor belts.

So 'fillers' didn't put coal directly into tubs but onto a conveyor belt?

The' were arl under agreement t' clean the face off.

What do you mean by cleaning the face off?

Remove all the coal cut and fired for that shift.

The 'pullers' who moved the conveyor to where you'd been, it was moved up near the face again....but down here [Calverton] yuh had ten yards each.....it was static money...yuh got paid a recognised 'static' for yuh ten yards, yuh see.

But at Usworth, we arl mucked in. If aa was fillin that area....wuh didn' measure them oot.... wuh just spread oot...arl the way up the face....the' might be about twelve o' wuh.....150 to 200 yards.....yuh could see yuh lamps....the' were them lighthouse style lamps....fat, heavy things wira glass top an' a hook. Wuh hadn' cap lamps!

Yuh couldn' gerin two foot fower or two foot six.....

The' was some seams....the Maudlin was four foot six or five foot and the Brockwell, further down, on the pit bottom.....the Busty seam!



Figure 24: Working the seam

So you were working on your knees virtually the whole time?

Aye. On wuh knees arl the time. Aye!

I remember me dad talkin about different conditions in different seams and where some were very wet. Can you describe the conditions?

Aye. Aa mean [Jim describes how the conveyor belt system worked]

The shift beforethe coal cutter has cut a slot below...at Usworth it was four feet six [this was the distance 'reached' into the coal by the cutter

When that's cut out arl the way up the face, then it was fired....drilled the holes in....fired it.... .then arl that coal was lyin.....then yuh started yuh timberin [putting in wooden props to support the roof]

Yuh had t' advance otherwise it would come down on yuh.

At what stage did you start putting timber in?

Immediately you'd fired. Cos it'd release itself from the roof.

Was that your first job then, when you went on the face for the shift....put timber in?

Aye. Yuh done it progressively.

The' was some faces where it didn' get fired. It was jigger-picked. So yuh can imagine aboot fifteen windy-picks [*pneumatic picks*] gannin arl the time. The' were loosenin coal instead of it being fired. The' was some places where it was a danger to fire cos Usworth was a very gassy pit.

So you had to use pneumatic picks?

Aye. Jigger-picks, windy-picks.

Yuh couldn' get contact wi' the next one [*workmate*] until 'eed stopped 'is jigger-pick.

The' was on aboot wet....watter....arl the time it's comin down like rain droppin.

Was that every seam you worked?

Or, nor....that's why cavils used t' get drawn into a better seam.

But where there was watter it meant yuh pick was wet, ivereverything was wet what yuh were handlin, yuh knaa. And you were wet!

And that marvellous invention during the war years.... About 1940 there came a marvellous invention for women...plastic....never seen before. A plastic hat....yuh purit on....wirit bein low, the watter dropped stright in your ear [*because heads had to be turned to the side to work*]or yuh eyes.....The plastic hat.....like a hood...tied underneath yuh chin.....wuh arl had them!

I didn't know that!

Aye. Wuh nivver wore tin hats, yuh knaa! At Usworth. When aa left Usworth in '53 t' come here, yuh had t' hev a tin hat on afore yuh went down the pit.

But you didn't at Usworth?

No. Not at that time. Aa divven knaa whether the' eventually.....Some were usin them as the Coal Board developed from nationalisation. The' were gradually formin, in different pits, a responsible man in charge of younguns an' things like that...

So, did the colliery start supplying these plastic hats?

Nor.....the women fetched them.

Before then we wore the tops o' womens' stockins. Aye, wuh arl had our missus' tops....[*Jim chuckles*]

That was t' keep yuh hair oot the road, yuh see. An' sweat!

I never knew that. It must have been a well-kept secret was it?

That's what Usworth men wore.

An' when yuh were workin, yuh knaa, wuh only had our boots an' stockins on. Sometimes wuh were naked.

What we did hev was a one-legged 'steppy-in'. Like Tarzan! Yuh knaa yuh had a pair o' pants burit was just one leg yuh purin. Hev yuh ivver seen them?'

¹ Jim and his 'marras' [workmates] wore old trousers over their 'hoggers'- [underpants] . The legs were cut up the seam from the turn-upsto about knee height so they could be removed without removing their boots on the trek from the shaft to the seam, hung up and retrieved on the return journey

No! Do you mean like a skirt?

Why, instead of a pair o' shorts....these yuh put yuh legs in an' it fastened at the side. Aye! It was red hot!

So that's why you wanted the minimum of clothes on.

It used t' stick on yuh, the coal, yuh knaa. It used t' stick on yuh sweat. Yes!

Did you continue that until you came down here?

Aa came down here [*to Calverton*] in '53 an' left me mates.

Pit Work

But, anyway, the first type of piece-work you're introduced to in the pits in those days was pony-puttin.

Tekkin an empty tub in wi the pony, sittin on its limmers....the' used t' carry its own limmers!

By 'limmers' you mean what?

The side of it....It's like a 'Y'.....

Like shafts?

The' were shafts!

But the' were med of steel and wood....the' hooked onta the tub. But the pony carried them.

When yuh took 'im [*the pony*] in, yuh put the hook into the place in the tub, the hook went in there like that [*Jim demonstrates with his hands*] and it was lyin on the floor...the arms....and yuh backed yuh horse in...yuh fixed 'im up,...first of arl on 'is collar and back, ...'is gears,...so that 'e could pull the tub.

That was on piece-work!

Aa became the Average Taker.

It was a thing there, yuh had access t' pay notes t' watch how fluctuation of different districts....yuh might be in district number two and....good conditions, good coal....yuh were paid so much a ton, so much a score. Our score, by the way, was twenty-one! Not twenty!

That was like twenty tokens arl put on a tarry rope.

The tokens were a metal disc with yuh number on....The tarry rope went intiv a loop....Now, if yuh had twenty o' them with a loop, yuh put the twenty-first through them arl. Because, when the' came t' the pit top and the' were empty, [*the tubs*] you pura one on each tub, yuh see?

Down the bottom of the tub was a welded loop...yuh pushed yuh loop through, threaded it in, pulled it tight.

That was a physical record of how many full tubs you had?

Aye! It was a cock-eyed system!

I was Average Taker.

The' was Average Takers for the coal hewers, us, and for the fillers. It kept the eye on the basic thing....what various incomes were.

Then aa became delegate for the pit. Aa travelled t' Redhill, in Durham

What did that entail?

A delegate was the branch representative. When yuh got there, there was over a hundred.

Business would be put to the delegates and then yuh med a report when yuh came back....On the business of the area.

Sam Watson was the leadin man in them days.

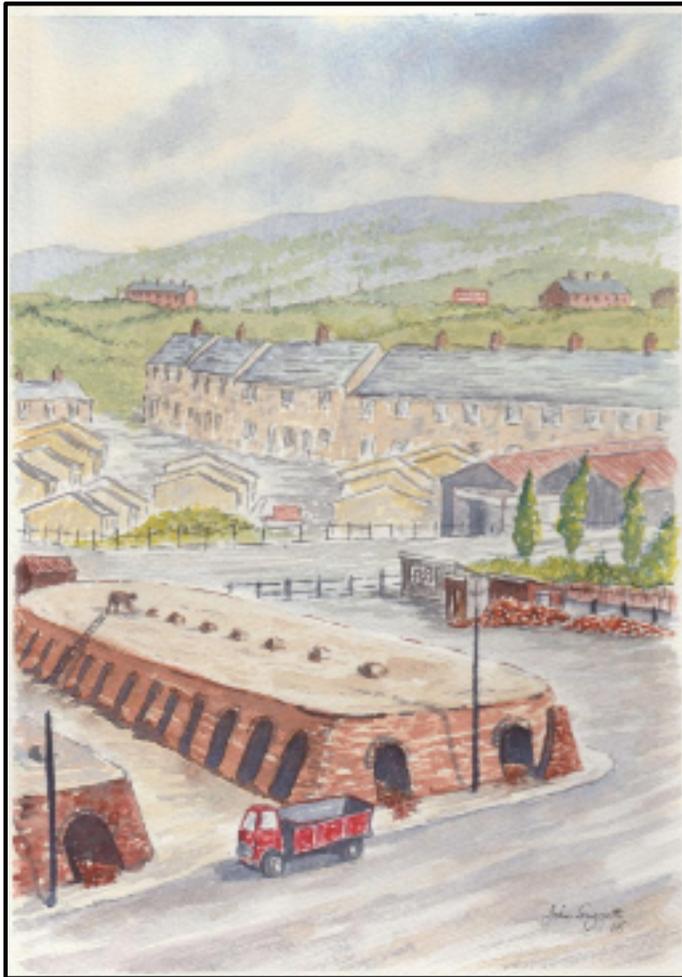


Figure 25: The brick kilns

How did you become a delegate? Were you voted on?

Yes.

Aa had a go....the man was retiring.....He was a famous man in our little world at Usworth....
.Timmy McGuire.

He was getting retired...It was open for hevvin a go....so aa did...and aa got voted on. And aa held it for several years.

How old were you when you first took that on?

In me twenties!

Then aa used t' gan t' Sam Watson's school.....

Every Sunda he had.....trade unionists schools....like that....for t' lecture t' yuh.

And you went there regularly, did you?

And aa went and got me....aa studied for me dep'ty's....and aa passed me dep'ty's tickets.

Aa passed them at Ryhope, that's where the exam was held.

Aa became a dep'ty for about three or four year at Usworth.

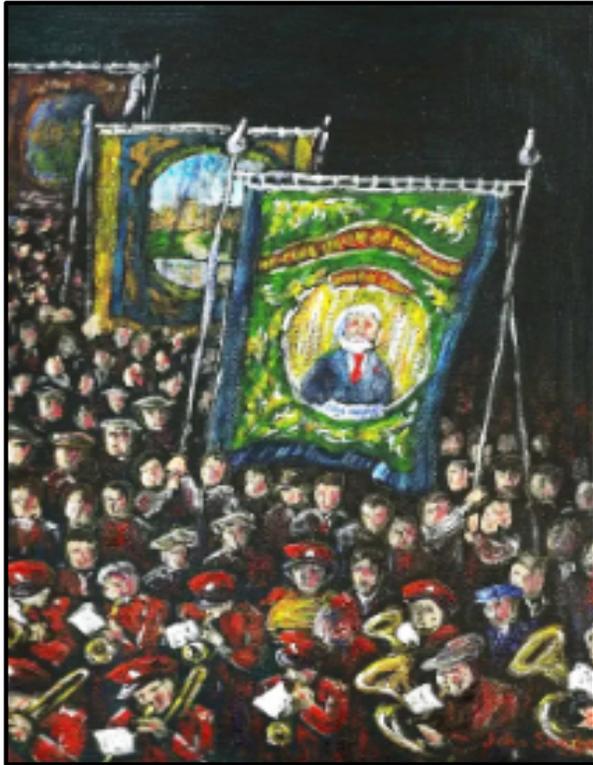


Figure 26: Washington banners at 'The Big Meet'

Rude Ladies and Lions

I remember you...sort of...continued my interest in drawing because me dad drew....and I thought he was a great drawer.....and then I realised that he could only draw three things [Jim laughs]

Then I saw some of your drawings and that inspired me.

So when did you start drawing?

It was arlwas a hobby o' mine ...drawin....aye.

Down the pit, yuh knaa, the shaft bottom was white-washed, an' the black dust used t' cling on the white-wash.

An' if yuh gora road-nail, what yuh nailed the railway with.....yuh'd arlwas hev one o' them....
.an' yuh could dee massive drawins on the warls...[*he laughs*]...o' different things....

When you were supposed to be working?

While yuh were waitin for the next.....

We had a unique little pit, down the pit, at Usworth, yuh knaa.



Figure 27: John Suggests father, also John

Wuh had a shaft...from one seam down t' the bottom. From the Hutton seam level, it went down past the Beaumont seam t' the bottom....the Busty.....an' it had a drum above it, above the shaft....an' one cage was at the bottom, an' one cage was at the top.

Now, our Hutton seam could....two tubs out with fullins....and the man at the bottom was bumpin the fullins out wi' the empties. The fullins used t' go down t' the bottom an' the empties came up.....by the gravity.

So, how did this relate to your drawing?

Well....in between 'runs'.....when the two empties come out, aa coupled them onta the set, an' then, waitin for the next one.....it wouldn' be long t' wait but....yuh could hear 'im reet away down there....fetchin empties from the shaft bottom t' send up the 'stapple'. It was carld 'the stapple'.

Is that when you used to do your drawing?

Just draw on the wall, aye!

Rude ladies! Aye! Lions.....draw lions.....yuh could deeit.....

An' a lorra names was on.....J. Tatters 1937. [he laughs]

So, did that translate, then, to when you were at home? Drawing?

Aye.

Aa used t' like t' draw.....there's a one [Jim points to one of his pen and ink drawings of Southwell Minster on the wall.]

Aa used t' do a lot.

Were you encouraged at home?

The' would watch yuh an'that but the' never encouraged.

You see, a lad in my street, when I was in my early teens, older than me by a few years, was talking to me one day and my best friend, who lived next door to this older lad, had told him that I liked drawing. So the lad went home but soon came back with a drawing book under his jersey. He said, "Me father doesn't want me drawin, yuh know. Drawin's for 'puffs', 'e says."

Aye, why.....aa divven knaa whether that influenced in our house but.....the priority what aa was fetched up with waskeepin yersels alive!

The' were local men, who had been in the First World Wah. Local heroes of the First World War, and these purus [*put us*] through our drills an' that.



Local Heroes

Tell me about the Home Guard.

Yeah! Well, at Usworth pit, you wuh virtuallypress-ganged into it.

Yuh were arlready with a special.....document, issued from the gover'ment that yuh were an 'essential works order'.

That came from the war before when, if yuh weren't at the war, a lady could walk out the crowd an' come over t' yuh, an' place a white feather in your coat, yuh know...embarrass yuh!

Coal was the most important thing during the war. Wuh didn't realise that! But there we were.

Now, we had a platoon.....it seemed t' grow from Chester-le Street towards Harraton.....an' Washin'ton.

It was a Durham Light Infantry batallion....an' that's what we were in in the Home Guard.

We used t' meet Tuesda nights, Thursda nights at the Usworth Miners' Harl.

Wasin'ton men met somewhere else. An' different groups did.

Yuh practised....."Wuh ganna invade Weshin'ton," or....."The Birtley men's or the Chester-le Street men's ganna invade wuh."

We used t' hev like a 'set-piece'.

Reference:	WO 409/27/83/512
Title:	James Tatters
Description:	James Tatters - born 07/11/1921, Usworth - Durham Home Guard, 23rd Battalion
Date:	1940-1945

Figure 28: Jim Tatters Home Guard record in the National Archives

How many of you would be there at each meeting?

The platoon.....I reckon the'd be about fifty of wuh. In army cloes [*clothes*].

Aa left arl mine in Single Row cos aa didn' gan up t' move. The' moved the furniture an' that an' arl this stuff was up in the attic. Somebody'd gera shock when the' went up there!

Tin hats....but not the rifles.....the rifles had t' be handed back, yuh see.

Aa wore me top....like a blouse...a type of army coat...a tunic....aa wore that later on down the pit. Cos wuh had no baths then. The baths didn' get completed 'til about 1949.

Arl through the war, we were comin home black! An' for a matter of weeks the baths could have been completed...but buildin stopped, yuh see!

So, who was in charge of your platoon?

The' were local men, who had been in the First World War. Local heroes of the First World War, and these purus [*put us*] through our drills an' that.

Were questions asked if you didn't turn up?

Yuh had t' hev an explanation if yuh didn' turn up, aye. It wasn't just a matter of yuh just go when yuh felt like it. It was compulsory!

Yuh would be threatened with going before a panel...explain why you didn' turn up for work.

Did you have to check black-outs?

Or, no. That was another organisation carld...National Home Service or summat like that. They had a different uniform. The' weren't soldiers. They did go round checkin that no lights was shinin through peoples' curtains.

Did your Home Guard meetings last throughout the war?

Yes, right through, an', efter a certain extension, yuh earned yuh medals. Aa got me two medals. The War Medal and the Defence Medal.

So, you were doing a full shift at the pit and then having to go out.....

See our Home Guard..an' aa think it was a pattern, generally, in the minin areas.....

Our manager was carld Williams....Mister Williams....our coll'ry manager. An' he was an officer. He was army officer. An' his overmen were officers.

So it was passed on through the dep'ties an' they were sergeants. [*laughter*]

Yuh see....if the sergeant happened t' be a dep'ty.....an' 'e says: "Now....wuh meetin at six o'clock.....Is there any beer ganna be anywhere t'night?"

"The' might be some at nine o'clock.....it the Stile Inn. Aa've heard that the' getting a delivery."

"Whey let's get this ower with! Wuh'l gan ower the pit heaps an' wuh'l gan through that wire again....that defence wire."

Craal through an' things like that!

Yuh knaa, an' wuh'd been workin in low seams.

Yuh'd get like.....can yuh remember John Liddell? The' was a big fam'ly o' Liddells!

The seargeant used t' be a dep'ty....but John would say: "Bollocks! Aam not goin there!" [*hearty laughter*]

Why the dep'ty had t' tell the manager, an' the manager had t' come down an'.....

"Do yuh not think wuh gerenough craalin in two foot down the pit?"

An' yuh see, you had to.....in army life.....yuh hadn't t' say: "Aam not goin t' do it."

But it was more obscene language wi some o' them t' the dep'ty, yuh knaa.

Or mebbes at work the next mornin.... say 'e went t' work Thursda mornin, an' the dep'ty come round.....'e would prob'ly say t' yuh: "Will aa see yuhs t'night?"

Cos wuh were nearly arl in uniform.

An' one o' the men would 'chime in' an' say: "Yes, but you effin - - - , eff out between ight an' nine cos wuh'l be in the New Inn!" [*more hearty laughter*]

Yuh knaa, things like that!

'E used t' hev t' try t' arrange summat so wuh were on a march, but wuh arl marched into the New Inn!



Figure 29: Washington Home Guard

So, you fitted in your duties with having a drink?

Oh, aye.

If yuh were bein invaded, yuh could get captured!

If it was cad [cold]. Yuh might be out in the snar [snow] at night.

We were lyin in Weshin'ton Cemetery one neet an' waitin for this invasion comin....an' it niver come.

The' were ganna come ower from Dame Margaret's Home t' the cemetery t' geron that road.... Glebe Crescent.

So it was very quiet.

"Whey it is quiet, man. Wuh're in a bloody graveyard!"

"Listen, man, the' should be summat gannin on!"

An' one o' them comes back from the Washin'ton Arms.....cos yuh could chuck a stone inta the graveyard from there.....

"They've arl got captured an the' arl in the Washin'ton Arms."

"Aa the' not comin then?"

"Nor!"

So, gan round t' Dame Margaret's.....get captured....an' then we could arl gan t' the pub.

Wuh were frozen.....but, oh, a lovely fire, yuh knaa!

Of course, the people who captured you would have to guard you as well so they would be able to stay!

Whey, they wanted a drink an'arl so some o' them come alang wirus. "Wuh'l march these down t' the village green!"

"Right!"

The's a lorra that went on!

The' really showed us some realistic things, mind.

We had professionals used t' come.

And yuh were tired, lad. Half-starved, rations, fillin bliddy coal and yuh energy used t'.....An' the used t' hev wuh runnin.

Down where that place is now.....the wildfowl place. That used t' be a little dell.

The' was Jackie Patterson's down there.....he used t' hev an industry down there in the owlden days....yuh grandparents could tell yuh. The' used t' mek pit shovels an' things like that. Blacksmiths!

An' the little stream ran down. It was a lovely, pleasant place.

Wuh camped there one weekend.

Whey....does tha knaa! 'E 'ad wuh runnin.....yuh bugger!! *[John laughs]*

We were out an' along t'.....as though yuh were gannin t' Smithy's Farm....then up past Geordie's Cabin....round the Sivven Houses.....an' down t' Weshin'ton.....then back reet away down again.

A circle, yuh knaa. Runnin!

Yuh arlwas had runnin or deein summat wi energy like that. An' exercise.

Sometimes yuh used t' come home absolutely bloody knackered.

Did they feed you reasonably well?

Na! Nah!

Sundas, yuh knaa...yuh might hev t' come out an' sign in six o'clock Sunda mornin. An' a lorry might come an' tek yuh away. An' yuh'd be somewhere strange an' yuh'd be getting sessions on machine guns.....mekkin them gan real.....firin them!

Stannin wira grenade in thee hand an' pullin the pin out....

"Dinna drop it tha knaas!"

"What? The pin or this?"

An' the'd arl be runnin away.

"Chuck it away, la!"

Things like that yuh knaa.

Eeee! *[hearty laughter from Jim and John]*

What about feeding at home during the war?

Well we got a pie.....used t' be on Fridas...out o' a little steel winda [*window*].....near the lamp cabin at the pit.

Yuh nivver knew who it was that give yuh the piebut the' was pie for yuh.

Wuh thowt wuh'd dee arlreet wi pies...wuh didn' think the catholics would he' them but the bliddy cath'lics come an' eat them. The' not supposed t' eat meat on Fridas, yuh knaa. Fish! Yuh had t' eat fish! Aye!

Meeting Josie

How did you come to meet Josie?

Whey, durin the war.....no beer....that was our hobby....gannin an' hevvin a drink....an' weekends in partic'lar.

An it was Easter weekend an'....the 'grapevine' used t' work....a pub was gonna gera supply o' beer.

Was it in short supply?

Oh, aye! So it had been rumoured the' was gonna be some beer at Fatfield.

Fatfield had three pubs then.....the Biddick Inn, the Havelock, an' the Ferryboat.

Burrit was a false alarm so there wuh were standin, and wuh were waitin just off the bridge where Wormhill Terrace starts, and down here comes Josie.

And aa was with a' brother-in-law, 'e was married t' Josie's sister. An' aa got introduced tiv a' then. An' it was from then that it started.

Aa lived down there for a while.....travellin on me bike t' the pit.

When did you get married?

'43.

Where did you first live?

In one upstairs house....at a shop....[it seems to have been near The Miners' Rest in Spout Lane] an' 'er man was in the air force, 'e was away. An' she had this spare room, so we started our married life there. Aa used t' get coal.....it used t' help....

So wuh were in that room for a while an' then wuh moved down t' one o' them little cottages that used t' be on the end o' the Biddick Inn pub which were pulled down by The New Town.

We were livin with Uncle Dave on Railway Terrace, near the pit pond, four doors from that Usworth pit pond.....wuh used t' catch tiddlers there as bairns!

An' once again 'the grapevine'.... one neet in 1947....."Wuh're arl gannin into the Squatters the neet", an' in wuh marched!

An' it was from the Squatters aa did a silly trick.....

Me turn came for a coll'ry house....aa shoulda stopped where aa was at. Aa had indoor toilets, baths, central heatin'...an' went into a bliddy owld.....reet in the middle o' Single Rar [Single Row].

An' aa think that was turnin wuh as well.

[Jim meant that their housing situation was causing them concern and contributed to their decision to move to Nottingham.]

It was about 1950 then an' the' was no sign of anythin happenin so down here wuh come.

In the meantime, while it was gannin on, yuh dad an' arl them moved ont a Coach Road Estate. *[John Suggett's family didn't move to Coach Road until 1959 or 1960]*

Aa couldn' wait!

Hostel Estate (known locally as The Squatters)

Now, Hostel Estate was a huge field area behind Woodland Terrace and Station Terrace. It was built to cater for a bombed-out town.

It wasn't army....although the army 'knocked around' They were houses that could tek people during the war. It wasn't like a soldiers' barracks....that was up at Blackfell.....Blackfell Camp.

I can remember, just before one of the big battles, all of a sudden the township was crowded with soldiers wira bear ...a white bear....on their arm. The'd arl been stationed in Greenland or somewhere like that.

Usworth med them welcome....club wise and things like that...and dances.

Then, arl of a sudden, one Monda yuh went up t' Wesh'nton as usual, t' the shops.....an' the' were gone.! Aye!

[Jim thinks that they went to prepare for the Normandy landings]

So, Hostel Estate, which I remember mainly as 'the Squatters', was built for the evacuation of homeless people?

Well, homeless people caused by being bombed out of their homes.

It was strategic for arl the Tyneside towns which were in danger of being bombed. The' did gera hammerin, some o' them.

As far as you recall, were people housed in the Hostel Estate?

What happened was this, John. Peace came in 1945.

We were, naturally, established...workin at Usworth pit....and we were livin in rooms. That was our trouble! Wuh were arl just livin in rooms or with yuh parents. Cos, when the war started in '39, building houses stopped. Arl that was at a standstill.

When peace came in '45, nothing re-commenced immediately....for us impatient younguns or wuh fam'lies.

The grapevine started t' work!

And one night wuh invaded and took the lot! Then the civil servants that was guardin the gates were overwhelmed. There was no violence. Wuh just crowded them out and took over.

The one [*house*] aa got was a special....one of three that were on the edge, just behind 'The Gardeners' [*public house*].

I was a dep'ty at the time but wuh still come home black. Our pit baths were almost complete when war broke out.

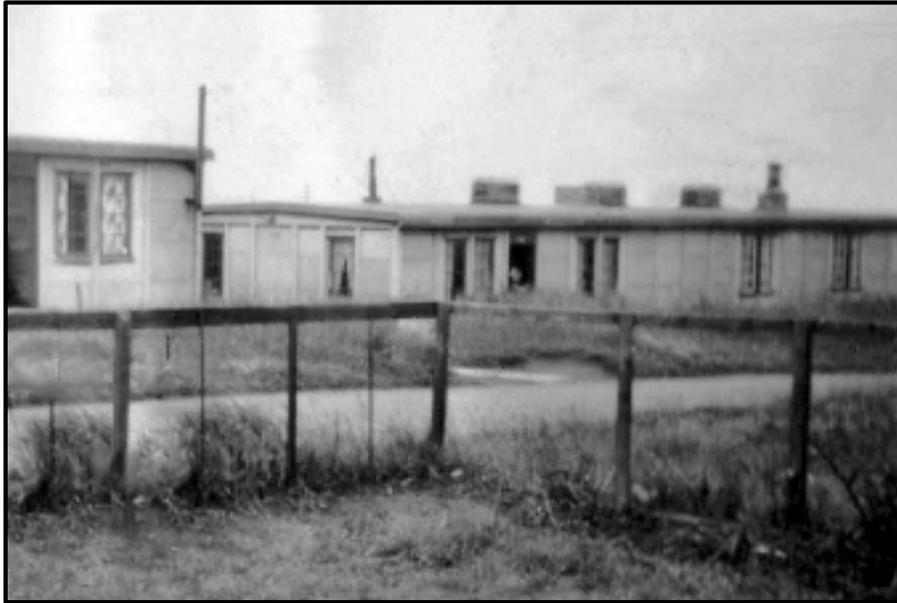


Figure 30: The Squatters Estate

Were the majority of the people who took over Hostel Estate miners?

The' were. Mostly Usworth lads. Wuh moved wuh little community there.

Was there some sort of dialogue among people?

The' was hundreds of us yuh know.

The' was some the' husbands was still in the army and the lasses were livin at home wi' the' mothers. The' would have children or were goin' t' have children.

And our house became a little bit of a maternity home.

Aa once went in a room t' visit me cousin in one o' the Squatters huts, just near the garage.

She was in a little room, half the size of this. [*The room was about nine feet long*]

It was virtually just a cupboard.

An' aa ses t' me cousin, "Is she gonna hev her baby here?" An' he ses, "Aye! We'll get help yuh knaa."

Aa came home an' aa telt Josie, an' Josie says, "Tell 'er t' come up here." An' wuh rigged up a room for a'an' Nurse Glew.....she brought arl the children in in them days.....came and that child was born in our house.

We looked after them!

The hard thing is when wuh had t' turn them out.....back to 'er little cupboard further down the street.

Wuh felt very guilty.

But wuh did that wi' several. Josie's sister was in the same situation. She came, but, unfortunately, the little girl died at birth.

But things was rough in childbirth them days. There was just the nurse and whoever would help tha knaas.

Our Josie did a lot of that in her young life.

She also laid people out, our Josie.

Cos the' was, in the Squatters, some owld people that came t' live.

And Josie got the job wi' them.

Were there ever any repercussions to your takeover of Hostel Estate?

The' was threats an' that, but we were just solid.

Aa divven knaa what would happen wi' modern day youth, but we were as solid as a brick wall.....without violence....an' wuh were adamant.

"But where yuh ganna put wuh?" "If yuh chuck wuh oot, where yuh ganna put wuh? Where wuh goin?"

Yuh knaa, aal things like that!

An' the' gave in an' wuh started t' pay rent.

An' the' was a terrific 'lectric bill to be paid for. Aa mean, the' coulda turned that off, but the' didn't. So that was alright.

So, who did you pay the rent to?

The council. An' aa don't know if the council was just agent to the Ministry of Defence or whoever.

When did you move in there?

Aa moved in 1947. That's when it was taken over.

Lads was comin home from war and comin back t' the pit and findin jobs and livin in rooms wi' the in-laws and arl them troubles.



Figure 31: Living at the Squatters

And how long did you stay there?

I gora colliery house offered me which was the biggest mistake of my life.

Me turn came round for a house, number thirteen Single Row which was one of two rows – Single Row and Quarry Row—almost buried wi 'pit heaps.

An' aa left. Wuh were stupid. Wuh shouldn'a left but wuh did and that was in 1951.

So aa lived there about four years. Best time of our lives!

But the people wuh helped.....the' would arlwas say, "Gan up and see Jim Tatters an' Josie.... they'll see what the' can do for yuh."

And we would accommodate them.

We nivver asked nowt o' them. Aa was a dep'ty at the time and nivver asked any finance from them. Some o' them wuh fed as well!

But wharra state some o' them was in. Terrible yuh knaa!

The' was nivver any money in them days an', when the' squatted, the' were arl on tick wi' bits o' furniture that the' had t' get to furnish. The bed an' a dinin table, a kitchen cupboard.....things like that.

The Hostel Estate was vast yuh knaa.

Jim reminisces about revisiting the site of the Hostel Estate and reminds me that his younger daughter, Christine, was born there. Apparently, John's dad kept Jim company there whilst Christine was being born.

So, how did you come to know my mam and dad?

Your dad came from Perkinsville, Pelton, and I think the war had started....aam not sure....but whether it was through dances or what aa divven knaa but he came to live with your mam when the' got married. The' came t' live with 'er dad cos he was a widower.....on Johnson Terrace. A' dad was a dep'ty at the pit.....Joe Lonsdale. So, the pit 'e was workin at, South Pelaw Colliery, near Chester- le-Street.....aa think, a' dad, bein a dep'ty, pulled some strings an' 'e came t' work wi' us. An wuh stuck together ever since.

So you met him in the early 1940s then?

Aye, in the early '40s. It was through pit work. Cos when you're in the pit, you're aal comrades. We accepted 'im, he wasn't a foreigner.



Figure 32: The Mining Community

Calverton

What brought a proud Usworth man 150 miles with his family?

Well, the Coal Board came inta bein two years after the war finished. Nationalisation came. It [*the Coal Board*] produced a monthly newspaper.....an' it was tellin yuh the progress of this pit.

Me an' Alec Wilson, natterin one time. Alec had a car..he says: "Is it worth gannin down an' hevvin a look sometime, Jim?"

Aa says: "Anythin but this!"

And yuh knaa....the pit was getting owld.....there was no future for Usworth....an' yet it went t' '75, yuh know!

And we came down.....and we saw the situation.....an' the housin that was goin on writ....and that's how we joined.

The' was four o' wuh came altigither but two o' them went back efter a fortnet.

Alec's brother an' a lad carld Steve Nesbitt.

How long had you worked beside me dad? You worked together for a long time, did you not? You still worked with him in the '50s, didn't you?

Ah, yes. Aa left thee father'e was on the face....aa left 'im an' Jackie Cockburn.....wuh were arl fillin tigither.

It was a canny seam an' arl....it was the Mardlin [*Maudlin*] seam. A Wearmouth man would carl it the Bensham seam.

Union and Civic Work

When aa left to come down here [*Calverton*] Aa thowt aa'd pack it in. But aa soon picked up to the union life down here cos it was wanted.

The' were comin in from arl ower,....the' was no organisation.

The' was a branch of the local men but the' was things needed t' be done. Aa got t' work on that.....Aa forced mesel up farther than that into the schools....From being no schools to being that twenty-five acre development [*the Manor Park Infant, Sherbrooke Junior, and Seely Comprehensive site*]

Aa became executive.....Aa was a delegate at this branch and aa became an executive at the headquarters at Berry Hill for several years.

Then aa became a magistrate from 1970 to 1990.

And aa was arlwas inta arl different things.....Aa was local housing officer for these coal board houses.....kept these sorted out.....

School governor and manager...for the three, Manor, William Lee, and John Sherbrooke, schools. But then the' made Seely....aa was there for, oh, twenty years

And aa was on that board in those days as the County Councillor for the location. He could never cover arl his schools.....Lambley, Woodborough, Ravenshead before it developed, Newstead and Annesley. That was a huge area so they were entitled to nominate a representative.....so aa was nominated and my job was to be on the committee here on behalf of the County Councillor.

We used t' meet reg'lar and aa used t' keep him up to date on how wuh were progressin, what wuh were doin, and he would give me a few tips on what had been discussed at County Hall.

When the County Councillor retired, a ballot was taken and a Tory was elected. So Jim got a letter from the County Council”that’s your lot!” Thanks for twenty-five years!.....Aye!



Figure 33: Jim the Magistrate

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In Memoriam of James Tatters (Jim)



7 November 1921 to 26 December 2013

Jim was born in Washington, Co Durham and at the age of 14 he left school to train as a cabinet maker in Sunderland, before working underground at Usworth Colliery. He met Josie on the bridge crossing the River Wear at Fatfield, and they married in the village church in 1943.

During the second world war, Jim joined the Durham Light Infantry Home Guard, attending manoeuvres after work or on his days off. He was eventually awarded The Defence Medal, and the George V 1939-45 War Medal.

Their daughters Joan and Christine were born in the North East, then in 1953 Jim moved his young family to Calverton where, after several months living in a chalet at Calverton Lido, he had secured work at the colliery and a brand new council house on Lee Road.

Jim readily settled into his new life in the village, and was soon involved in many activities. These included the NUM branch at the colliery, and the creation of a Branch Banner, for which some of the ideas he sketched were used. He was involved in the development of the Miners Welfare on Main Street and was sad to see it eventually demolished in 1991. However, as a Trustee of the Calverton Miners Welfare, he contributed to the development of the "Top Club". He visualised a club that would provide changing rooms and showering facilities for the various football teams using the adjacent pitches, as well as leisure facilities for the miners and their families, and a great place for a cold pint after a shift underground. He was very proud to have been invited to officially open the club, and many years later, to be involved in the sealing of the Time Capsule beneath the commemorative Wheel opposite the Top Club.

During the 1950s he was a Governor of Manor Park, William Lee and Colonial Frank Seely Schools, being built to accommodate the huge influx of families into the village. He was also a member of the local Labour Party, on occasion turning our sitting room into a campaign office on voting day.

In 1970 Jim was sworn in as a Justice of the Peace in the County of Nottingham Petty Sessions Division, where he served for 20 years, retiring in 1990. He was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal, inscribed with his service as a Magistrate.

His interest in the First World War began in the 1960s, and over the ensuing years he collected numerous books and military maps, as well as making many trips to the Battlefields in Northern France and Belgium of his favourite places was the Menin Gate in the Belgian town of Ypres, where every evening at 7.00pm the Local Firemen sound the Last Post. Jim travelled there many times for Remembrance Day. At other times he would attract a number of visitors to hear his account of the terrible events that occurred there. Although he spoke no French, he made many French friends on his travels.

Jim was a family man and in his younger days a keen gardener growing vegetables for the table. He also was quite an artist, enjoying drawing with pen and ink. We are grateful that he lived to an age (92) that allowed him to see the arrival of his two grandsons and three great grandchildren. He was as proud as Punch.

Anyone who regularly passed by the house would often find him pottering around in his garden. He loved to stop and chat to everyone, and few escaped! It has already been said that the corner will be a much quieter place without him.

£365.00 was raised. It was Jim's wish that this should go to the Calverton Practice. The family would like to thank the Rev. Pat Hemstock, Mick Lloyd, John Suggett, and Eric Sturman and all who paid their respects at the funeral and for all of your messages of condolence. Thanks also to Arnold and District Funeral Service, and the Top Club.

Jim has left a huge gap in our lives and will be greatly missed by us all: Josie, Joan and Mick, Christine and Keith, Robert, Claire, Chloe and Lily, and Richard, Vicki and Arcl

R.I.P. JIM

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Glossary

In an effort to give some idea of Jim's dialect, I have tried to write certain words in the way that they sound to me and how they can be interpreted but, for more insight into the dialects of north-eastern coalminers, reference should be made to the excellent, " Pitmatic : The Talk of the North East Coalfield" compiled by Bill Griffiths (2007).

I have used.....

aa....for I....aa went yem [home]

wi'....for with....I like chips wi' me fish

me....for my.....(see above)

mesel....myself

wuh....for we....wuh used t' play

wuh....for us....keep wuh away from them

wuh....for our....wuh (we) had wuh (our) bait (food)

yuh....you....yuh need t' try harder

hev....yuh hev t' try harder

yuh knaa....you know

the'....for there...the' was nowt left. **The'** for they.....the'were arlwas poor

t'.....to

tek....take....t' tek notice

o'....of....t' tek notice o' things

arl....all....wuh read arl the signs

arlwas....always...aa arlwas tried me best

harl....hall....Usworth Harl

footbarl....football

carl....call....What did yuh carl him?

carld....He was carld Jim.

intiv....into....Alec went intiv the bookies.

gi'....give....gi' me one o' them

watter....water

purit....put it

gerit....get it

oot....out

mebbe....may be

nivver....never

'es or **'is**....his....'is ('es) pigeon

larn....learn....yuh had t' larn it 'off by heart'

gan....go....gan t' hell

gannin....going....she's gannin t' bed

t'gither....together

folla....follow....folla that man

hadta....had to....aa had t' gan yemand other things too varied to explain....good luck!

It is usual to drop the 'g' from the ends of words e.g. walkin, playin, runnin, etc.

It is usual to miss out some letters from within words e.g. amb'lance, reg'lar, partic'lar, Sun'land (Sunderland), Weshin'ton (Washington), etc.

Like many of the miners I knew, Jim uses the word **'aye'** a lot.

It is used as an affirmative, in place of 'yes', when it appears after a question or at the beginning of a sentence, and it is usually spoken in a 'clipped' way.

At the end of a sentence, or on its own after some explanations or observations, it is spoken in a more elongated way and, whilst being affirmative, it also can be indicative of reflective thought.

Days of the week, when spoken, are usually shortened and without an 'ay' sound.

I have interpreted them as : Monda, Tuesda, Wensda, Thursda, Frida, Sadda, and Sunda. (I suppose I could have written : Monder, Tuesder, etc.)

Father is usually spoken with the 'a' as in 'fat' not as in 'fart'.





