Interview with David Calderwood

DC = David Calderwood Born 1902

SR = Sara Randall - Interviewer

**Early life**

SR Were you born in West Calder?

DC Yes, I was born in West Calder in October, 1902.

SR And have you lived here all your life?

DC Yes.

SR And whereabouts were you born, in West Calder village?

DC Exactly 100 yards west from where we are now, at what was then known as Burngrange Cottages. It was last the row of our houses and it was actually used by Burngrange Farm - their workers.

SR Were you from a large family?

DC Yes, I was the youngest of ten.

SR And how big was your house?

DC A 'but and ben', a room and a kitchen. Of course, by the time I came on the scene the oldest ones were out of the house. I'd a brother older, and the other brother - he was on the farm working

SR And what were the conditions like at your house, did you have water?

DC None whatever. You had four walls and two windows and a door and a roof. I think the house would be maybe 3s. 6d. per week. Oh no, there was no inside water or anything.

SR And you had tap outside did you - or a well?

DC A well outside served the four houses, and there was an outside toilet at the end which served the four houses as well.

SR Was that a dry toilet?

DC That was a dry toilet, yes.

SR So who fetched the water - you or your mother?

DC Oh well that was everybody's task, whenever the water was needed. Very specially in the winter time you'd to make sure there was sufficient water in the house for starting the next day, for the well froze up.

SR So it was tough?

DC Well, you say .... looking back it was tough, but in these days it was the done thing and you thought nothing about it. That was the method of life in those days and you just accepted it.

SR And was your father quite well paid - did you always have enough to eat and enough clothes?

DC By my time, yes, me being the youngest. There was never any want in the house. But I quite believe in the earlier days things would be very tight. Of course my mother was brought up in the country, she did all her own baking, knitting and sewing, gardening. These were the days of patched trousers and jackets and jerseys - it was all hand knitted jerseys that boys wore. Your childhood days and your early youth - these were the happiest days of the lot.

**Medical care**

SR Have you ever had any serious illnesses?

DC I had pneumonia, which in 1921 was serious. I can always remember it was the right lung that was affected.

SR And you couldn't go into hospital?

DC Oh that was unheard of at that time. The nearest hospital was Edinburgh Infirmary, and it was a horse-drawn ambulance at that time which took about two and a half hours to travel from here to the Infirmary.

SR So you had to be really ill to be taken?

DC I remember the first case that was taken direct to Edinburgh and he was actually a cousin of my own. He lived in Stoneyburn and his doctor went to see what was wrong with him and it was appendix, which was very rare at this time - 1910. Well, it was a Saturday and they decided they were going to send him to Edinburgh Infirmary and the harrier that had the charge of the ambulance all his horses were away of Broxburn at a football match, and they'd to hire a horse to take the ambulance out to Stoneyburn and they brought the boy into West Calder, kept him in the; carriage shed till the horses came back, and then away to Edinburgh.

SR Did he survive?

DC No he didn't he died. You see there wisnae the same methods for operating, the same antiseptic. You see by the time he reached the Infirmary the appendix was burst and it was a general septicemia in the whole body.

SR So when did you get married?

DC 1931.

SR And did you live at home with your parents until you got married?

DC Yes.

SR And when you got married, did you carry on living with your parents?

DC 'No, we got a house in Gold Place - that's the middle of West Calder,

SR And the first house that you went to in West Calder when you first got married, did that have water and electricity?

DC Yes everything, that property in Gold Place was all built between 1880 and the turn of the century. They were all what they cried 'modern' houses at that time - you'd water but you'd no baths and there were a couple of toilets for all this building.

SR And how many children did you have?

DC Just the one.

**Working life**

SR Just a son. And how about your working life - when did you stop working?

DC I stopped working when I was 68 because you see I carried on where my father left off in the Oil Work.

SR Hmmm, and how old were you when you left school?

DC I was only ..... I wasnae 14 until the October and this was the end of June. It was the first World war years you see, and the farmer applied to the local school board to get me an exemption that I would nae need to go back - I should nae have left until the Christmas time you see being born in October. But farm workers were scarce at that time and it was they hay time, and he wanted someone to drive the horse and the machine to cut the hay. And my wage was 6/- a week.

SR And did you keep it or did you give it to your parents?

DC Oh, don't ask a question like that. Your parents were everything. I think of my first pay I got sixpence.

SR So you went on to carting in the Works? And was that because your father had retired?

DC He'd retired. At at that time you see we'd only two horses, one did what we called the pit work - that was the work between all the pits, and the other was in the Work doing all the work there was to do there and I just moved from the one to the other.

SR Yes. When your father retired did he get a pension from the works?

DC Yes, 5/- a week.

SR And that was enough to live on '..as it?

DC Well, they never wanted anything. You see those that had been born in the last century and lived into this century had that sense of frugality about them. They were always saving, there was nothing wasted, they'd something behind them always.

SR When you worked on the farm what sort of hours did you work?

DC Well you started at 7 o'clock in the morning, and we were very fortunate in this respect: we were all employed by Youngs Oil Co. You see Youngs bought most of the ground about West Calder so that they could have the mineral rights to the shale underneath it you see?And at Langside Farm, Polbeth Farm and Burngrange Farm - that's going

right up, but they were all in the shale. We finished at 5 o'clock, it was half past five and it came to 5 o'clock.

SR And did you work on Saturdays?

DC Till 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

SR Mmmm, but you got Sundays off?

DC Sundays off .... well not really because you had to keep your Sunday to go cut and feed the horse and

SR What was it like round the Oil Works at that time, was it very dusty and smokey and oily?

DC Oh aye. An oil work cannae be nothing else but a dirty smelly place, that's about it.

SR But the smoke didn't come over West Calder too much?

DC No it was diluted so much by that time.

SR Aha, and when you lived in Burngrange Cottages, even just the four cottages - were you very close?

DC Well, the four houses .... well, they were nae door by door because they would be two rooms and then you'd another house with two rooms, and the doors were always in the center you see. They were demolished in 1939.

SR Yes, have a lot of the people of your generation and slightly younger than you, did they move away when the industry closed down?

DC Oh, there were a big number moved away. The first break was the Scottish Oils themselves. You see, the Youngs Oil Co. and the other Oil companies: Pumpherston, Oakbank and Philpstoun, they formed in 1918 I think it was, the Scottish Oil industries. Well, there was a good number of men from Addiewell went down to this place in Wales. Then when they built Grangemouth, there was 30 people left at Addiewell.

SR Yes, when your wife was alive, did she work?

DC Never worked a day in her life. I told her that the day she went out to work I stayed in. That was in the 40's - the war years. Most women were forced if they'd no family, but you see our boy was just 8 years old at the time and she was exempt, so she never worked.

SR Mmmm. Did your mother work?

DC Never in her lifetime. She brought up a family of ten: Did she work? She worked all day, she struggled all her days, oh no, no. That was never thought of in those days.

SR If we go back to discussing the pits did the horses suffer as much as the men?

DC No, on the whole, you know the pit ponies had a happy life for everybody was his friend. This laddie would be bringing an apple for his horse and he'd be going up the road to steal a turnip! Oh no, they were happy.

SR So were you in charge of the ponies and the pit boys who looked after the ponies?

DC Oh no, I didn't have anything to do with the pits at all, just the ponies, when they come up to the surface, maybe there would be some that were lame or had had an accident and they would come up to the surface for a while.

SR What have been the good changes? .... since you were a boy.

DC Well, I would say lifestyle. Lifestyle is different now altogether. There are home comforts for one thing, the type of houses we are living in. There are very few houses now that have nae central heating of some sort in them - that in itself.

SR When you were younger, when you first started working, did you get any holidays?

DC No! The only holidays in Addiewell Work was unpaid holidays and they got the last Friday and Saturday in July - that was always a big day in West Calder. The last Friday was the West Calder sports and they were a big thing in that day, and two days - New Year's Day and the day after it. Christmas was never given, a thought at that time.

***Questions***

1. *Where and when was David born?*
2. *How big was David’s house when he was a small boy?*
3. *Where did David live when he got married? What was the house like?*
4. *When David worked on the farm how often did he work?*
5. *Why did David’s wife not work?*
6. *What did David say are the main changes between now and when he was working in the mines?*
7. *If you were the interviewer what three questions would you ask David about his life?*