

MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION

BOBBY KELLY

THE STORY OF A GREAT LAXEY LEAD MINER

BOBBY KELLY died in 1990. Ten years before in a bungalow on the Ramsey Road, Laxey, he told ANDY GILLINGS his story in this interview of nearly an hour. The hardships of a lead miner's life above and below ground at the beginning of the 20th Century come clear from an old man's memory as he reminisces.

Recording by RAY DUDLEY – from Unedited Master – Strictly copyright 1980.

Bobby Kelly started in the Great Laxey Mine employment at age 15.

**He was born on 24th June 1895.
Died aged 94 on 11th March 1990.**

Recording made in 1980 when he was 85.

AG Well, just for the record, it's 8th September and it's Andy Gillings here and we are recording a conversation with one of the old miners from Laxey. Your name's Bobby, what is your full name?

Mr K Robert Joseph Kelly, my full name is.

AG Well, there we are, we've got the full name for the record, and all we want to do is just talk a bit about the mines and what life was like.

Mr K Well, of course, it's up to you to ask the questions, and I can get round to it better and you can go on.

AG When did you start working in the mine: how long ago?

Mr K Well, I started as a lad, what they call on the washing floors, you know.

AG Oh yes, where the gardens are now?

Mr K Where the valley, where the houses is, you know. That used to be the washing floors. Well, you had to start there before you got promotion to anywhere else, like... anywhere else – what they used to call the tan yard, and it was a tan yard, because you worked from 7 o'clock in the morning 'til 6 at night.

AG A long day.

Mr K Aye, and on a Saturday from seven o'clock in the morning 'til five at night.

AG A long day as well. That was every Saturday?

Mr K Every Saturday. Only one holiday in the year: that was Christmas Day.

AG And, presumably, Sundays you all had to go to church, did you?

Mr K Aye, or chapel, chapel. And, of course, you worked – no electric lights, all under duck lamps.

AG The duck lamps?

Mr K Duck lamps, what they called duck lamps. They'd be hanging up, you know, and be full of paraffin, and then the paraffin was coming down the thing, and then there was a kind of a round thing on, and then they just burned about six or seven flares on it. But they called them duck lamps them days.

AG And that was on the washing floors, in the sheds there. Were you under cover there, or was it out in the open.

Mr K Oh, you were under a certain amount of shelter overhead, that's all.

AG Cold in the winter, then?

Mr K Oh, cold and we, at the start, you had to, what they call picking chats, you know. There'd be men up above raking the ore that come out of the mines, and they'd be raking it from a gully. And then they'd be going through it, through a riddle, and then that would be coming out onto what they call it, a round, galvanised table or iron table, like, and it would... and...

AG How big would that be?

Mr K You would be here and there'd be about forty around this table. And you'd have to sort the stone – catch any stone and throw it in the barrer, you know. And then, when your barrer was full, you had to run and empty it, and the other fellas had to. You'd have to run to keep yourself warm, keep your feet warm. And then they'd all be doing that in your turn, and then when the, what we'd call the good ore was left, that was going to the far end. Well, then that chap would be taking it out, and then he'd be wheeling it out in a store place to go through the mill, what they call the mill, to be crushed, you know.

AG What would they do with the ore then?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG They crushed the ore, and what happened after that?

Mr K Well, it went then, when it was crushed, it went through different lines of progress, you know, right down 'til it went right down to sand, you know. The lead was took out of it, the zinc was took out of it, the copper was took out of it, and all like that 'til it was going right down to, really, slime and sand. And that all went into the river then, and that's what made Laxey beach so plentiful then, there was all sand. Laxey beach was all sand, and... no sand on Laxey beach now. And you hear them saying, 'Oh, we'll have to get someone to fetch the sand in.' Never get the sand to Laxey beach, because there's no sand going down Laxey river to get it on Laxey beach.

AG Oh, that's interesting.

Mr K You'll never get sand on Laxey beach, no matter what they do. There used to be a big sand bank one time, Laxey harbour.

AG And then did they take, they took the ore out in boats, did they?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG They took the ore...

Mr K On boats, yes, oh yes.

AG Do you know where it went to?

Mr K Oh aye, to Swansea and oh, different parts of the north of England it went to, and it used to be all what they call Monks boats [James H Monks (Preston) Ltd, founded 1907, moving to Liverpool two years later, becoming John S Monks in 1923].

AG Monks boats?

Mr K Yes.

AG What are they?

Mr K What they call, black and white funnel boats and that's... something like 'Sarah Blanche' [a collier owned by Andrew Knowles & Sons of Lancashire, later purchased by Ramsey Steam Ship Company and renamed 'Ben Blanche'] one or two of them but mostly...

AG Anyway, carry on.

Mr K They used to, you know... it's been marvellous to see it, the progress. It went through... it went through one big mill, you know, crusher, and then it went down to another small crusher, and then it would carry on then, and it would come out that fine. And they, what they call, went through a thing like a jigger, and they were all working like that all the time. And they'd be... the sand would be going on the top, and the lead and the zinc would always come out on the bottom, and it didn't fell... oh, marvellous if you'd been able to see them working, yes. They were all driven by water.

AG They had some water wheels there, did they?

Mr K Water wheels, they were all water wheels.

AG And how long did you have to work... how many years did you work on the washing floors, then?

Mr K Well, I only done the one year in the washing floors.

AG And then you got promoted?

Mr K Then I got on what they call, on the little engine, we used to call it then, the Ant and the Bee, and hauling the stuff from underground.

AG That's right, they had two steam engines, yes.

Mr K And we thought we were in heaven then, because we were then working eight hours a day. And, when you were evening shift, you only worked the five days, you see, and you were off every Saturday.

AG You worked afternoon shifts as well, did you?

Mr K Oh, aye.

AG Did they work at night at all?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG Did they work at night at all?

Mr K Not on the engine. They did in the mines, and getting twelve bob a week then on that, thought they were in heaven. Quite a lot of money them days.

AG Do you remember what year that was?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG What year was that that you were working on there?

Mr K 1910.

AG And how far into the mine did it go?

Mr K How far in? It went right up to, well, I would say the best part of a mile.

AG Went up to Agneash Shaft and Dumbell's Shaft.

Mr K Up to Dumbell's, yes.

AG Up to Dumbell's.

Mr K Yes, and then, of course, that's as far as the little engines went, you see. And, of course, you went up there, and what you would call just, like, on the tram where, you see, you'd shunt your wagons there to put them here for the striker. And the little engine would run round this way then, and take that end and it would take the loaded ones out – carry about seven, six or seven at a time.

AG Was the roadway, the track, very wet?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG Was the track wet at all or was it dry, what was it like to work there?

Mr K Oh, wet. Your feet were wet from the time you went in in the morning 'til you finished at two o'clock in the afternoon. There's no such thing as wellingtons then to keep your feet dry, because the water was always running out, you see. The level was always wet, full of water and you...

AG You had to grease your boots?

Mr K ... had to tramp through it to do the shunting of the wagons.

AG And they brought the ore up Dumbell's Shaft did they?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG They brought the ore up, the locos, up to Dumbell's Shaft.

Mr K Dumbell's Shaft, and then they'd have another day going to the Welsh Shaft [before 1870 always spelt Welch], drawing from there, and then you'd have another day drawing from the Engine Shaft.

AG And do you know how many men were working on the ground at the time?

Mr K Oh, about two hundred then.

AG And how... Did they work all together, or were they in little teams?

Mr K Oh, working in groups. Some places would be in groups of four and some in groups of two, that's all. There'd be no more than four in what they'd call a pitch, you see. Before they'd be in a pitch, that, of course, you'd have to get promotion again to get there.

AG And did you ever get on a pitch, then?

Mr K Oh, yes, I did, very handy. I got there with a lot – older men than me, like, and I was the young fella – and we were, I remember, I used to do all the blasting for them, because I was the youngest of the thing, you know. And when, you call it sinking the sump, when they call sinking the sump, you know, you start at the top and go down maybe about twenty fathom. Well, and then, when you're doing the blasting, you had to throw all the stuff up on a tub, you know, on a winch, and the three-men thing up, and then you'd be down there lighting your fuse – maybe six fuses at a time – with your candle. And the way you fired your thing them days was, you split the point of your fuse and you stuck a little bit of dynamite in it, in each one, and then you lit your longest fuse first and then went round on them all like that. And these fellas on the top would know how, trying to tell you, 'Come on, come on,' and then you had to put one leg in the tub and hold to the chain to lever you on up to get to the top.

AG Before the explosions went off?

Mr K Oh, you know, you didn't think nothing of it, really, much. But you didn't know when, whether you'd ever get up, sometimes – be blew up.

AG Did you have many accidents with explosives in the mines?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG Did you have many accidents in the mines, with shot firing?

Mr K No. There's been a few drowned. I remember one time, I think there was four drowned in Laxey mine. There was accidents in Snaefell mine, of course. Snaefell mine, you see, was only one shaft and they got suffocated there.

AG What was the air like in Laxey? Was there any ventilation to keep the air clean?

Mr K Oh, plenty of ventilation in Laxey, aye. Of course, some places you'd get in, you'd get in, you'd get pretty warm, but pretty draughty in places, in the levels anyway – job to keep your candle in. You see, you only, you only had candles in them days, what they call a calor candle. That's all the light you had.

AG You'd get used to it, did you?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG You got used to working with very little light.

Mr K Well, you had to get used to it. Nothing else for you.

AG And you stuck that on your hat, did you?

Mr K Yes. When they walking, or when they were going down the ladders, that's where you had it stuck on your hat, on a lump of clay, you see. And then, when you were walking in the level, then you took it off and held it in your hand to walk with a lump of clay.

AG And then you'd stick it on the wall where you were working, would you?

Mr K When you were working you'd have a couple, because it was all hand-drill, you see: all hand-work, all hammer-work, hand-working there.

AG Did you have two men to each drill, one for holding and one for hitting?

Mr K That's right, that's right: one to turn it and the other to hit it.

AG How long would it take you to drill a hole?

Mr K Well, it all, depending on the ground you were working in, you see. Sometimes you'd hit hard ground, like, you'd see fire coming from your drill, you know – that hard.

AG Making sparks?

Mr K And then if the jumper was any way poorly sharpened it would be gone in no time. You'd use three or four jumpers to get started, and then you'd make it, as you got down farther, you might strike a good bit of ore – lead or something – and then you'd bore nice, you see.

AG So how...

Mr K It was all done by Bargain.

AG Yes, and then you'd fire the explosives would you?

Mr K Pardon?

AG You'd fire explosives, would you, to bring the ore down?

Mr K Oh yes, yes, oh aye. That's what I was saying. I used to do all that, being the youngest and didn't think nothing of it them days.

AG And how much, how much ore would you bring down every time?

Mr K Oh, well, you wouldn't bring a big lot, it's all a... You see, Laxey Mines is very funny, because, some places, you'd get good, plenty of good blasting ground, plenty would come out and leave the sides, what they'd call... there was a hanging side and a lying side, you see.

AG Oh, yes, because the vein was on a slope wasn't it?

Mr K That's right, yes, you see. And there'd be lots of room. Once you get the piece off the hanging side, then the lying side, if you got a good hole in that, would come away and give you a good, good Bargain for your blast.

AG And then what happened to that ore? Who took it to the shafts?

Mr K Well, they had then what they called marines, you see, two men what they called marine staff. They would come and one, we'd take that stuff where I was working anyway up in the kibble, and they'd tip it out so far. And then, when they get enough out, they give these fellas a day's work to haul out to the shaft. They'd come and they'd take this away, two men with a wagon would come and cart this away. That'd be their day's work, you see.

AG They weren't part of your team?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG They weren't part of your team, were they?

Mr K Oh no, no, oh no, no, they were a different gang altogether. They were what they call marines.

AG And how long... you spent the rest of your life, did you, working, actually getting the ore out did you...?

Mr K Yes.

AG ... or did you do anything else?

Mr K Well, no, that, the most of the thing I was on when I got in a pit. Of course, you had to start as what they call... you were working in twos – what do you call them? – knockabouts first, you know. You got work and a mate with you, and you were sent all over the mine to different places to work.

AG What, doing all sorts of jobs was it?

Mr K Wheeling out. As I say, the shift boss would come and he would say to us, 'Now we're short of stuff,' and the men could be working up there and he'd say, 'I want that stuff and you've got to run that bunning,' what they'd call... you'd be working on that stuff 'Now, I want that stuff, you've got to run that for them.' Well, you'd be down below and you'd be going so far, and you'd have to wheel that – Knockabouts – you'd have to wheel that to another gully to put it down for these marines to take it away next day. That's if you're on night shift.

AG And when did you finish in the mines?

Mr K When, the time the strike came on, 1918, beginning of 1919, the strike came on.

AG What was the strike in aid of?

Mr K Well, a fella come from Blackpool called George Titt. He was going to do wonders for us, and he got us all sacked. We were doing all right, we weren't grumbling about our wages. Well, it was under the Great Laxey Mines and they couldn't afford, they couldn't afford to pay the money that he was fighting for. He come over very... He could get all this money for us and we weren't getting paid and we weren't getting paid... it was getting on the end of the war then, you see, and you weren't getting paid. And, well, what happened.

AG You weren't getting paid?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG You weren't getting paid for the work?

Mr K We were, we were doing all right under the conditions. We thought we were all

right, we thought we weren't on a bad wage some time. Oh it varied, it varied by the month.

AG How much would you get on a good month?

Mr K Well, I would say them days if you had about £4.00 a week was good wages them times.

AG And did you have to settle a Bargain every month, then?

Mr K Yes. There was the four of you working together, you see, and there was one man picked out, you see – he'd Bargain with the Captain, you see. The Captain only come down once a month, you see...

AG What was his name?

Mr K ... and he would say... well, he'd say, 'Offer you some more? No, can't do that, can't do that, can't do it for that,' and this first fella would fight with them, you see, 'til he got a reasonable price from him, you see. Well, then they would knock a hole where you left off in the wall, you know, where you start from again. You'd start from there, kind of style.

AG You measure from there?

Mr K You measure from there for the next month, so, as it got to be, we got paid once a fortnight, latterly.

AG Oh, so you didn't have to wait for the end of the month for a big pay out?

Mr K Well, we did at first, but they got paid once a fortnight in later years. And, of course, it was, in the mine, with being a miner, you had to pay for everything. You had to pay for your candle, you had to pay for your fuse, you had to pay for your dynamite, you had to pay for your caps, you had to pay... and you had to pay for getting your jumpers sharpened – you had to pay for everything.

AG And who sharpened the jumpers, then?

Mr K Oh, they had blacksmiths in the blacksmiths' shop.

AG And they were... you had to pay them to have your tools sharpened?

Mr K No, that was all taken out of your wages, out of your Bargain lot.

AG Yes.

Mr K You see, when you would be wanting your jumpers sharpened, you'd have to fetch

them out to the shaft, and they'd be laying there. And they'd be brought up in the kibble and tied up, and your name put on them. And then they'd go out, and then you'd have to go and collect them when they'd get out of the mine and bring them to the smithy – what do they call it? – blacksmiths' shop, and get them sharpened and pick them up next morning and get them sent down again to you wherever you were working. And then you had to fetch them to wherever, wherever you were working... you had to fetch them from the shaft to wherever you were working.

AG And you had to carry three or four, you say?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG You had three or four jumpers did you?

Mr K Oh, you had three or four. You had what they call a, just a short one about 18 inches, what they call a pitcher; and then you'd go to one about 18 inches; and then you went to another 2 foot ;and then you'd go to another, maybe 2 ft 6; and then go up to one 3 ft to 3ft 6.

AG And what sort of ends did they have on them? Were they a point, or did they have a flat end?

Mr K Oh, points, every points.

AG They weren't shaped like a chisel?

Mr K No, they were sharpened just like a, just after the style of a chisel, you see, but they were long, you know, long pointed you see. You'd start off with what they call a pitcher would be a long one, you see, and these other ones were made smaller to follow on, you see.

AG I see, so you start with a pitcher to start your hole and then...

Mr K Then they'd be getting, your thing would be getting smaller, you know, to follow on all the time.

AG I see. But you say you finished work there in 1918 with the strike.

Mr K Yes.

AG You didn't work there after that?

Mr K Well, no, it was shut then, you see. It didn't open until... not, oh, until Williamson bought it. I don't know what... was it 1922 when it opened again, or was it later than that?

AG I think I've read it was round about that. Williamson was the grocer, wasn't he?

Mr K Yes, old Williamson, the man that owned Laxey Glen Gardens and all.

AG And did he employ everybody who was there before?

Mr K Oh no, no, he only robbed it. He just worked the top of the mine. He didn't go down the mine. His son, his son, learnt the Mine Captain. He only robbed it and took the top of the mine out. It didn't last long. Well, he robbed it.

AG Did he make a profit from it?

Mr K Oh, I don't think so, no, I don't think so.

AG Anyway, there's one or two questions here I'd like to ask you. How deep in the mine did you go?

Mr K I worked down, not many did work down – well, there was a mate of mine, a mate of Norman's here, Norman's father-in-law, and I worked down the 302 in Dumbells.

AG That's right at the bottom of the shaft?

Mr K Yes, right at the very bottom of the mine. Not many did work down there, only another fella that I met about three years ago. He come home from America and I met him at the garden street there one time and got talking about the mine. And he used to live up Agneash and his name was Brew, and he was telling me he worked down there. And he, when he... he was there when the mines shut and he got a job on the Manx Electric. And he went to America after, and that's where he's been ever since.

AG Very interesting. How did you get down to that bottom depth? Did you have to climb down ladders?

Mr K Down ladders. The Man Rod, the Man Rod only come down to what they call 110, you see.

AG Yes.

Mr K Well, then you had to walk along level then, and then all down ladders, all the way down.

AG How long would it take you to get to work then?

Mr K Well, it would... well, you were going under at six, or five past six, say. Well, you were getting to, well, I suppose, six, seven, eight... it would be half past eight to nine

o'clock when you'd get there.

AG And then you'd start coming up at 12 o'clock, would you?

Mr K Yes, you had to leave about twelve to get up to there, getting up, and time you'd stopped to have a bit of lunch. You only had about ten minutes for a bit of lunch, bread and jam and water.

AG And that was allowed in the Bargain, that you would have ten minutes for lunch, was it?

Mr K Well, there was no such thing as what you were allowed.

AG It was what you could...

Mr K You knew what you had to do and how much you had to do, else they'd be after you the next day that you hadn't done enough, you see. So you knew what you had to do and you had to get through it. And all you could wear was a flannel singlet and a pair of dungarees. Well, you all wore a flannel singlet because, with the sweat and all, well, you never went cold because, when the singlet got wet with sweat, it dried on you warm. It didn't dry on you cold, not like a cotton thing or wool thing.

AG And then when you came out of the mine you had to leave the clothes to dry, did you? Did you change at the mine or did you...?

Mr K I didn't because I hadn't far to go. I brought all mine home and I had them dried at home. But they had a big changing house there, and some of them did always leave them on the boiler, the big boiler there, all to dry their clothes, you know. But I never fancied that.

AG Whereabouts did you live?

Mr K Oh, just at the... I don't know if you've been that way or not, just below here, just down below.

AG On the Glen Road?

Mr K Yes, just at the bottom, just opposite the Valley Gardens.

AG Oh, I know yes. How far away from the mine did men come to work? Did they all come from Laxey?

Mr K Oh no. As the mines closed, they come from Foxdale and they come from North Laxey, what they call...

End of first part of the recording.

Mr K ... oh, Ballajora way they come, Ballajora way. They used to walk all over, up over the mountain to come.

AG Walked every day?

Mr K Every day, oh aye, oh, there every day. They even walked from there up to Snaefell Mine.

AG That was a good long walk.

Mr K It was a good long walk, aye.

AG Can you tell me how old were you when you started at the mines?

Mr K How old?

AG Yes.

Mr K When I started?

AG When you started.

Mr K Fifteen.

AG Fifteen. You'd been to school had you?

Mr K No.

AG No school in those days.

Mr K No school them days, and didn't... it didn't apply to age going in, either.

AG Well, how young did people work there?

Mr K Who?

AG They had younger people than you?

Mr K Well no, no, oh no, no, no, they had no younger than me. I, on the way I got in was because, when I started on what they call on the washing floors, I was, I was... went message boy for the Captain of the mines, you see. And I kept asking him was there any chance of promotion, you know, every time I was meeting him. And he would always say, 'We'll wait and see. You'll have to wait, you're a bit young, you're a bit young,' you know. But he come round to it, and then I remember he give me a Christmas box – he give me a silver threepenny bit.

AG That was very good of him. Threepence was worth a lot in those days.

Mr K Yes. I think I've got it home yet.

AG Never spent it.

Mr K Yes.

AG And how old were you then when you finished in the mines?

Mr K I think twenty-three, I think it was, between twenty... no, fifteen to nineteen... aye, going on twenty-two, twenty-three, yes.

AG So not very long.

Mr K For as long as it lasted.

AG Yes. What did you do after that?

Mr K Oh, well, after that I went in the Manx Electric.

AG Before Williamson took over the mine, before the grocer took over, who was the Mines Captain before him?

Mr K Oh, well, Captain Roberts. There was, in my young days, there was a man name of Captain Reddicliffe.

AG Oh yes, yes, I've heard of him.

Mr K He used to live in where they call the Mines Cabin [Tavern] now – well, a pub.

AG Oh, by the station.

Mr K Yes, that was his residence then. Well then, when Captain Roberts come, a Welshman, well, of course, he lived up the back, just up the back of the bus station there. Well, and then there was another what they call the Mine Captain, Captain Bateman. He lived out at the mines. And then there was another old man all his days in his life, Ned Christian, he was the shift, like the shift [indistinct]. He had to go down the mine every day.

AG He was a sort of under-manager?

Mr K He had to go round them all every day, that poor man. Very nice and very smart man, too, at his age. And he worked in the mines until he was well over seventy. Of course, he wasn't working, of course, but he had to travel all them shafts. He'd be

one day in the Engine Shaft, supervising the men, and another day in Dumbells, and another day in the Welsh Shaft. Oh, a great old man he was. He'd be telling you in the morning where to go, where you had to go to work.

AG He'd tell everybody where to go?

Mr K Yes.

AG And then he'd go round and see that people were there?

Mr K I remember the day that I got hurt. Anyway, he... There was a chap in the mines the night and he broke his leg and he got brought, you know, he come up. And this day I had a feeling I didn't want to go to work, you know, I didn't want to go. So he said, 'Aren't you going to go to work?' I said, 'No, I don't think I will. I think I'll go home.' So anyway I went, but I weren't long at work until I was brought up in the box.

AG This was what they call the dead box, is it?

Mr K Yes, the thing... I just went down in this hole when a lump of rock slipped off the hanging and fell and caught my leg.

AG And broke it?

Mr K And I was off, oh, I was off for months. And the Captain of the Mines come to see me and he said, 'You know, Robert,' he said, 'we can't give you no compensation, can't give you anything,' he said. 'You're a member of that club, and,' he said, 'that'll have to keep you.'

AG You had a club to pay out for sickness, did you?

Mr K Eh?

AG You had a club that paid you when you were sick?

Mr K That's right.

AG And you had to pay the club every week, did you?

Mr K Yes, yes.

AG How much did that take?

Mr K Every month.

AG Every month?

Mr K Oh, it was only a sick club, like, two bob a month. But there was no insurance them days, you see.

AG Oh no, no. There's a story that the Mine Captain left little pockets of ore to go back to. Is that right?

Mr K What?

AG The Mine Captain would leave pockets of ore that he knew was there. He would leave those so that, if the mine got in trouble, he could always come back there and take those out?

Mr K Oh I don't know. I never heard, I've never heard of that, not in my time. You know, they did try to sink another shaft there at the end of Dumbell's Row, there. You know that, Norman, don't you?

Norman Watty Deep.

Mr K Watty Deep, yes. They did try to sink a shaft there, but it was no good.

AG When was that?

Mr K During the war, during the First World War.

AG Yes, yes.

Mr K But they, you see... Once the mine closed they all had to go to Africa and America and all, scattered all over the world, you know. Laxey used to be a very, very busy place one time. Oh, well, it was the only place, really, was for you farming or the mines.

AG Was there any fishing from here?

Mr K That was the two main industries.

AG Did anybody do any fishing?

Mr K Fishing, well, the miners done most of the fishing themselves, you see. They done a lot of fishing.

AG You were saying that they sunk a shaft on Dumbells Row, or near there, did they? There's a story about a shaft further north than Agneash, beyond Agneash, called the North Shaft. Do you know anything about that one?

Mr K About a...?

AG Another shaft, as you go up the valley you've got Dumbell's Shaft, and then Agneash, and they started another one north of that.

Mr K Well, the only one ever I heard of what they call, and I went along that way with my father-in-law sometimes and he talked, and he used to call it Anne Jane's Hole. It was a big hole, and quite a few fell in it, you know – quite deep – and they had to pull them up on ropes. But, that's all I know about that. I've been around that way, used, as you go round from Oliver's Farm [at Agneash, where the Oliver family were miners and also Methodist preachers] to Ballaragh.

AG Did your father work in the mines?

Mr K He worked in Snaefell mines.

AG He didn't work in Laxey?

Mr K No, well, that's me father-in-law I'm talking about. My father worked in... well, he didn't work in the mines, he worked on the washing floor. He worked in the lower part of the washing floor when they had the women on the washing floors.

AG They didn't have any women working in the mine, did they?

Mr K Oh, Lord no. I wouldn't go in the mines again, I'll tell you.

AG Sorry?

Mr K I wouldn't begin again.

AG You wouldn't?

Mr K No. It's not... you could see, you know... If you could have seen what place you were going, you wouldn't have went, you see. But the candle, you couldn't see much with the candle, because you only could see where you were walking.

AG You didn't realise how dangerous it was?

Mr K It's such big holes up above you, and, when you'd be night shift, there'd be only two of us in the mine, the whole mine, working, and yet you'd hear a drop of water. It would be just like a ton of bricks. And then you'd hear the rumble somewhere else further away, a lump of rock falling. And when you'd be going to go up, you don't know what you were going to meet or where it was. Only two of us in the mine, many and many and many a time, in the whole mine.

AG Why would that be? Why would there only be the two of you?

Mr K Well they'd say you want to get so-and-so tonight, night shift. Just come and tell you. You couldn't say no.

AG So they'd come and tell you to work a night shift, if they just wanted a couple of chaps to come and work.

Mr K Yes. They'd say to you today, when you'd go home at two o'clock, they'd say, 'Now, come back tonight at ten o'clock to do a night shift.' Well, then you'd be off the next day 'til the following day again, you see. Only two of you in the whole mine. Makes you [indistinct] *really* think sometimes.

AG Were there any ghosts in the mine?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG Were any ghosts?

Mr K Oh, never heard of any. Never think of such things then.

AG Probably a good job too. Anyway, I don't know if anybody else has got any questions? Certainly, it has been very interesting to hear you. Have you got any stories about the mine?

Mr K Well, there's a couple, you know, who blew their heads off.

AG They were firing explosives and didn't get away quick enough?

Mr K No, I think it was a matter of suicide.

AG Life was that hard, they didn't like it?

Mr K Well, there was one case – it doesn't do to talk too much about it – he was going to get married, I think the next day. Oh, there's... And then, of course, you know how they used to draw the ore from where the Valley Gardens is to the boats, you know. It was all horse-drawn then, you see. They used to hire horses from the farmers: they'd have about six horses.

AG They didn't keep any horses themselves?

Mr K They what?

AG The mine didn't have any horses of their own?

Mr K No, no, they didn't have none. But when they come to load the boats, you know, they'd send word to the farmer. The farmers were glad enough to get extra copper. And they'd send for them to come, and they'd go. And they're all done at night time

– there was never no loading the boats in the day time, it was all night time. Going past those houses they must have been kept awake all night with the shouting and singing of the fellas on the wagons and all that. It was an awful spot.

AG Was there a railway then, or was it always taken by cart or was there a railway down to the...

Mr K There was a rails going down as well, oh aye. Always was, all my time, all the time, I mean, I've lived.

AG And how were the wagons on that pulled?

Mr K Well, the wagons were carrying about five ton at a time, you see, and you used to have... they were packed up so much, and then there'd be four across the middle, and always had to be a brakesman on it, you see, where the down-gradient was. He then, save the wagons shoving the horse, you see.

AG Oh I see, so the wagons would run down on their own, would they?

Mr K Oh, aye, but, I mean, only so far, you see, and then run too fast, of course. They were all old farmers' hosses and that, and they couldn't run as fast.

AG They couldn't run too fast.

Mr K No. And then when they got down towards the shore a bit, they'd have to put traces on to pull them up, like, to pull the wagons up, you see, the one the horse wouldn't pull.

AG So they had to put a team on?

Mr K They had to put two horses on, then you were going right down then. There used to be a weighing machine on the quay and it was weighed there and then they went right down to the point of the quay. The boats were always stopping well down to the point of the pier.

AG And you know these engines that you drove in the adits, the Ant and the Bee, the engines, the locomotives, the locos.

Mr K The locos?

AG Yes, how big were they?

Mr K Oh, only little things, not the power. And the driver, the man that was driving the engine, you know, he was always, he was always sitting with his back, wherever he was going, you understand me. He was always sitting this way, looking at the engine, and where he was going his back was going first. If there was anything in his

road, fell or anything, by the time he was in or the time he was out, he would have been squashed to pieces. And then coming out again the same way. He had to be this end of it to check the wagons and shove them too fast down the gradient, you see. And then, when you were on, you were on the last wagon. On the last wagon was a little step, about that big, and you had your two feet on that step and your head down all the time, the way you wouldn't catch the ceiling, wouldn't catch the roof of the...

AG How many wagons would that pull at a time?

Mr K Oh, six or seven. And you would go in, you would go in the first at, say, half-past six, your first time in. Well, then you'd be in, because they'd be working maybe night shift, and there'd be some ready for you for, if there was any special thing on, needed some ready for you. Or they maybe start hauling before you'd be ready to get there. You'd have maybe about five ready for you, and get out about nine o'clock, you see. Well, then you'd have a cup of tea, then, for your breakfast out there. Well, then you'd go in again and go out again at ten; in again and you'd be out again at twelve maybe. You'd have to wait to get loaded up, maybe a couple of extra wagons, and you'd be out again at half-past one.

AG You were lucky then that you could come out and have a cup of tea?

Mr K Well, that, yes, while you were on the engine, because you could get hot water from the engine.

AG You used that to make the tea?

Mr K Yes.

AG Lovely. And did you have a fireman with the engine?

Mr K Oh, yes.

AG I should think he had a job, didn't he?

Mr K Beg pardon?

AG He had a busy job?

Mr K Well, he had the fireman and the driver, you see. They're only little, you know. I don't know did you ever see the ones at the Groudle Glen and that.

AG I didn't see them, no, I've seen pictures.

Mr K Aye, well, then, you can see how small they were. I think the Ant and the Bee they called them.

AG That's right, yes. And didn't they have to carry the coal lodged on the side of the boiler?

Mr K Yes.

AG So you had to have big lumps of coal so that they wouldn't fall off?

Mr K No, no, they didn't never a lot. They had a little kind of a bunker behind them, you know, and if they stopped you could well stoke up, you know, while he was in the mine, because he wouldn't use much coming out, you see, when it was all down hill. It was only when he was going in. He would be using all the gradient down, you see, coming out.

AG Was there a lot of smoke?

Mr K Oh, choke yer, sulphur you know, because it was the steam coal. Oh, choke yer.

AG Where did that come from?

Mr K You see it was coming out of the coal, and then it was hitting the roof and coming down on you. Weren't very high, the tunnel going in, not very high, you know.

AG Where did the coal come from? Did they have to bring it in by boat, did they?

Mr K Oh yes, oh aye, it had to come by boat.

AG Did they bring other materials in for the mine?

Mr K Did they what?

AG Did they have to bring other things into the mine, like timber?

Mr K Yes, yes, a lot of imported timber, oh aye, oh yes, a lot.

AG Where did that come from?

Mr K They had to use a lot of timber, timber for in what they call the pitchers, like, and buns, you know. They could be all ones here on top of this house. You could be working up two or three fathom from the bottom, you know. You'd have to make a bench for yourself, you know, across with timber before you could start to work, and you'd stand on that 'til you get a blast or two to get a footing.

AG And did you, when you were working, did you work upwards, did you stoke upwards?

Mr K It all depends you see. Sometimes you would be working up; sometimes you'd be working down; other times you'd be drifting, what they call drifting – make a tunnel you see, making a drive in to somewhere else to look for something.

AG Which was the easiest?

Mr K Eh?

AG Which was the easiest work? Which did you prefer?

Mr K Well, I'd preferred the down one because, when you were driving up, you were all the time, you know...

AG Over your head, picking over your head?

Mr K Aye, over your shoulder. The other ways weren't so bad, I don't think, and then, when you were going in on the other way, you had to get down low and hit that where you keep your bottom level.

AG Keep the level down, yes.

Mr K Keep the drift level, you see. That's with hand, of course. There weren't many drill machines in the mines them days, only blinking big things that took two men to handle them. They were on a blinking big pole and took two men to lift them up to put them on the pole.

AG And what did they work off?

Mr K Eh?

AG What drove those drills?

Mr K Well, they were for, when they were driving up to Agneash on the Horse Level they were used for.

AG You say the Horse Level. Did they have horses in there when you worked there?

Mr K Horses, no, but that's what they called that drift, going up past Dumbell's. They always called that the Horse Level. Why, I don't know.

AG But the drills: what drove them? Was it compressed air?

Mr K Compressed air, oh aye, it had to be compressed air down the 310, too. You had to have compressed air there, too because once you seen your candle getting, going down, you knew it was time to get out.

AG You used the compressed air to ventilate the place?

Mr K Well, down there you had to, because it was very hot down there, you see. There weren't, there was no other drifts or anything. You were more kind of in a box.

AG Where did the compressed air come from?

Mr K Oh, from the machines up at Dumbell's and the Welsh, them places. Compressed air come right down from there, from machines up there. The men that was doing the haul of the stuff from the mines was using the compressed air just the same way, you see. Oh, aye, compressed air came from up the top of the land.

AG Yes. How big were the pipes?

Mr K Oh, the pipes, I don't know how... You would see it when down the thing, but it was well hidden in, somehow.

AG What, it was buried in the side?

Mr K Yes, buried in the side, aye, especially in the thing. That's the only place I knew where it was. The compressed air was in Dumbell's, going down to the 302, but they had it latterly in the 50 where they had to use the machines, you know.

AG Sorry, where was that they used the machines?

Mr K In the 50 when Williamson took over, you know.

AG Oh ,yes, well, I think that's been interesting. Are there any more questions? I don't know whether, Norman...? Well I think we've talked for nearly an hour. It's been very interesting and I'd like to thank you very much.

Mr K Well thank you, you're welcome.