

STONEYBURN STORIES

Voices from a Village Built on Coal









The chapters of this book follow the ten locations selected and featured on the map, which is within the centre pages of this book. Some locations have several stories and illustrations which relate directly to it, such as the school. The ninth landmark, which is a collection of buildings, has no related story, but simply an illustration representing one of the many memorable faces from the past. The White Gates, number seven, shares its story here with Bents Station, one of the three locations of the Gates throughout the village. Maps are also available separately. Both the book and the map can be viewed online at www.generationarts.co.uk



FOREWORD

This book is part of a project to save and pass on to future generations some of the important landmarks of Stoneyburn's past.

The whole project consists of the book itself, a walking map that takes in ten important locations, and a short exhibition. Whittling down the list to just ten locations was not an easy task. Stoneyburn is a village rich in stories and social history, and the project could easily have been extended to include many more.

The exhibition presents work by children from Stoneyburn's two local Primary Schools, the artist's drawings, and selected highlights of the resource materials that were used in putting the map and stories together. We are also indebted to Claire Lamond, who has allowed us to show as part of the exhibition her Bafta-nominated short animated film, 'Seams & Embers' (2012), which she made during her residency at the National Mining Museum at Newtongrange.

The project is the result of the combined efforts of several people who have an interest in recording the story of Stoneyburn. Foremost among them is the Stoneyburn Heritage Group, which has been researching the project for the past two years, gathering material and discussing key landmarks in the social history of the village. The Group was supported in this by West Lothian Council Community Education officer, Ruth Plevin, West Lothian-based charity, Generation Arts and the Stoneyburn and Bents Future Visions Group.

Thanks to a grant from The Big Lottery, the Group has been able to work with writer Andrew McCallum and artist Gordon Shaw, to create a series of illustrations and stories inspired by ten locations in the town. Using audio recordings, old photographs, maps, newspaper articles and public records, the Group was able to guide Andrew and Gordon in their creation of this book.

There are two other books documenting Stoneyburn's past, which were enormously helpful. These were both written by local man John B. Murray, and are factual accounts of the development of the town; 'The Forgotten Baby' and 'Stoneyburn - The 1st 100 years'.

The artists also visited each of the primary schools, to hear from pupils about their special places in Stoneyburn, and to help them write poems and create artworks inspired by those places. It was a huge pleasure for the artists to work with such good-humoured and enthusiastic children, and we hope that the schools are able to use the book and map for many years to come.

We have heard many colourful and fascinating stories, which weave together into the tapestry of an industrial 'frontier' village, whose inhabitants toiled hard to (quite literally) scrape a living from the 'black gold' that seamed the surrounding landscape. We have also learned how Stoneyburn folk toiled just as hard to provide themselves and their children with health care, education, recreation, culture, and a rich and varied social life, in the days before the Welfare State. Over many entertaining hours, the Group has discounted the slanderous, set aside the unsubstantiated, and unraveled the complexity of a vibrant working community.

We hope you enjoy reading this book. Please keep in mind that, while they are based on real places and events, the stories are fictional and have been told with some poetic license with a view to capturing the spirit of Stoneyburn - both the place and its people.

Joanne Brown,
Generation Arts, 2017

STONEYBURN - A VILLAGE BUILT ON COAL

John Wilson, Collier, 1918

I didn't learn much at school, but I did learn this: that Stoneyburn is millions of years old. That's because Stoneyburn was built on coal, and coal takes millions of years to form.

We mine coal for energy. We burn it in our fires to keep our houses warm and dry in the winter. We burn it to generate the energy we need to make iron and steel and electricity. If it wasn't for coal, we wouldn't have had an Industrial Revolution or many of the things we take for granted nowadays. In fact, if it wasn't for coal, we'd all still be likely living in the Stone Age, hunting animals with wooden spears and flint knives. We have coal to thank for almost everything we take for granted today. Here's what I learnt at the Institute, off a professor from the University who gave a talk there one night on The Geology of Coal. The energy in coal comes from the sun's energy, which was stored in giant plants that lived hundreds of millions of years ago in swamp forests, a long time before even the dinosaurs existed. When these giant plants died, they formed layers at the bottom of the swamps. Water and dirt began to pile up on top of the dead plants, and over thousands and thousands of years, pressure and heat pushed out the oxygen and caused chemical changes that turned the remains of the plants into what we call coal.

I also learned from reading at the Institute that mankind has been mining coal for thousands of years, first by digging out the coal lying either on the surface or just under the surface, then by sinking shafts deep into the ground and working out from those shafts in tunnels that followed the line of the underground coal seams. Well, I knew that already. That's still the way we do it today.

And I've learned from experience that it's dangerous work. There's always a risk that the tunnels will collapse on top of you, or flood with the water that's always dripping or running down through the rock. The seams also hold pockets of gas, which can suffocate a man, or explode and catch fire from a spark off the metal tools we use. We use wooden props to hold the tunnel roofs up, and keep live canaries in cages to warn us if gas is present. Canaries suffocate long before a man will. So, if the canaries start dropping off their perches, you know it's time to get out of there - and quick!



And sometimes the tunnels you work in aren't very big. They can be barely a few feet high in some pits around Stoneyburn - just big enough to squeeze your shoulders through. In fact, they can be so small and narrow that you have to crawl along them on your belly, without being able to turn around. Occasionally somebody gets stuck like a cork in a bottle and has to be pulled out by his workmates.

You work all day in those narrow spaces, hewing the coal from the face with a pick and shovel. It can be such a bother getting in and out, you often don't even come out to eat your *piece*. You just take it in with you when you start work and eat it among all the dust and *stour*.

It's not very nice work. But we don't feel hard done by. It's all we've ever known. It's what we've been brought up to do.

They reckon that coal's been mined around here since the late 1700s. But these were just tiny wee pits that employed only handfuls of men, who lived in farm cottages scattered across the countryside. There was no village as such at Stoneyburn, just a farm.

In 1874, however, Drumpellier Coal Company began working the coal seams on Thomas Maxwell Durham's Foulshiels Estate and, within five years, Maxwell's newly formed Loganlea Coal Company took over the running of this pit.

In 1878, in response to the need for housing for miners, Fauldhouse stonemason, David Dewar, built four cottages (known locally as 'Dewar's Buildings') on what became the Main Street. Other cottages soon followed, and the village of Stoneyburn was born.



1. & 7. BENTS STATION AND THE WHITE GATES

Jessie Bruce - Level crossing gatekeeper

Come on, you! Out my road! There's a van waiting and I've got to get my gates open to let it through.

There are three sets of gates in the village, all painted white. That's why they're called 'The White Gates'. Stands to reason, doesn't it? I look after the White Gates at Bents Station.

It's a very important job. The law says that railways have to be fenced off, to stop livestock from wandering onto the line and getting killed. Which is all very well when the lines just run through fields and that, but what do you do when the line crosses a road? You can't fence off a road. Nobody would be able to use it.

So, somebody came up with the idea of having gates at the crossing. Even when the gates are open, the railway's still fenced off, because the gates stop people and animals wandering along the line. And when they're shut... well, they're shut, aren't they?

Anyway, it's my job to open and shut the gates when anyone wants to cross the line, and to make sure that the oil lamps, which light up the signals for the trains, are kept trimmed and filled.

I started working on the railway in 1930, the same year that the passenger service on the line came to an end and Bents Station closed. My laddie, Ian, was born in the station cottage in 1941. My man works on the railway too, as a surfaceman. His job is to check that all the fixings of the rails and track are secure, and to tap the rails to hear if there are any cracks or faults in them.

There are four signals to stop the trains at the Bents crossing: two at the White Gates themselves and one at about a quarter of a mile distant in each direction. The signals, as I say, are lit by oil lamps. The lamps have to be carried to the signals in all



weathers and pulled up into position behind the red or green glass, using winding gear attached to the signal itself.

The level crossing is left open to trains. Road users have to ask me for it to be opened; though there's a separate wee gate for pedestrians. It's all controlled from a signal box. When I'm asked to open the gate to traffic, I start by changing the distant signals to stop, then the home ones. After that I throw a lever to release the gate bolt, before going down to open the gate.

There had been a station here for many years. In 1846, the first stop was opened, on what was the North British Railway's Bathgate, Wilsontown, Morningside and Coltness line. The line was originally built to transport coal, from the West Lothian coalfields to the foundries in Glasgow and North Lanarkshire; though it soon started carrying passengers as well. In fact, I can just remember when children from Fauldhouse and Stoneyburn used it to travel to school in Bathgate. That was long before I started, mind you.

Miners walk on the railway, to get to and from the various pits in the area too. The line can be quite busy with miners when the shifts change over. So much for keeping the railways fenced off!

All the passenger stations on the line closed in 1930, leaving just the goods traffic. There's recently been talk of the line closing completely. Not that it bothers me. British Railways are planning to replace all their gated crossings with automatic barriers anyway, which means I'll be out of a job in any case, whether the line stays open or not.

'Progress', I suppose!

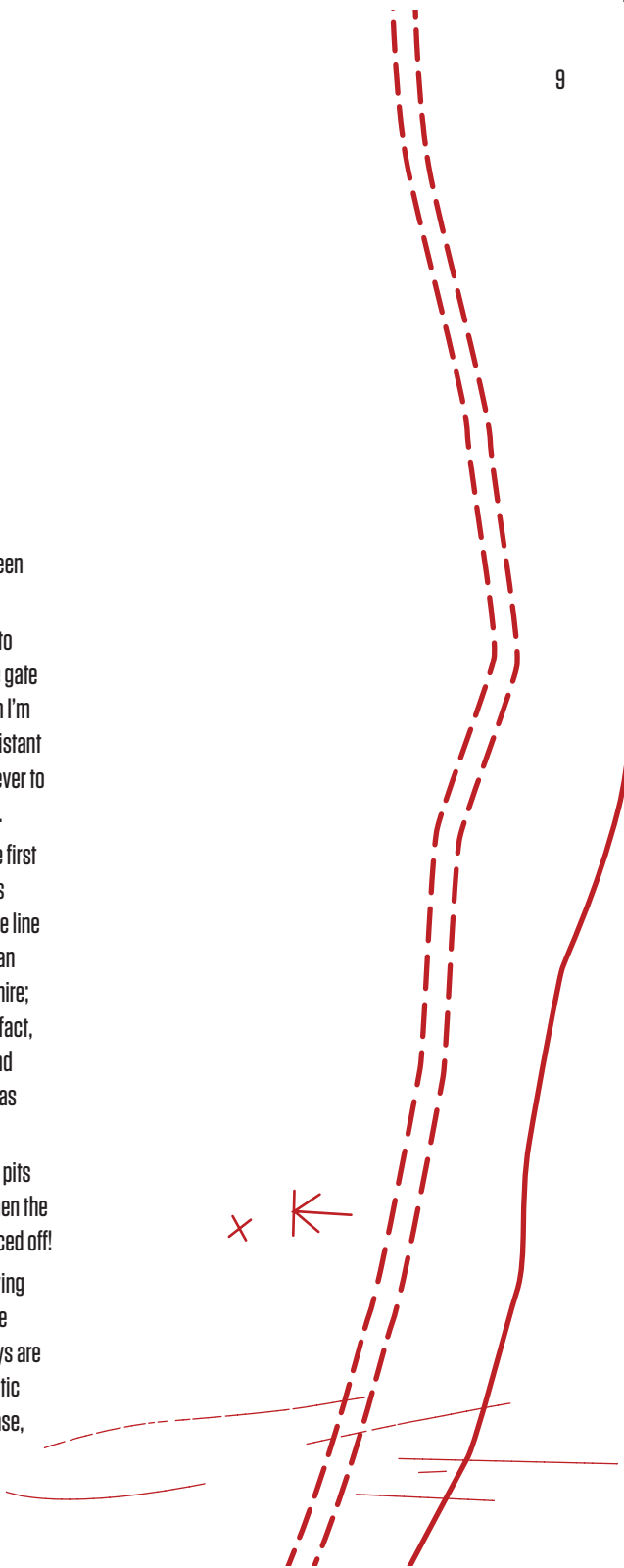




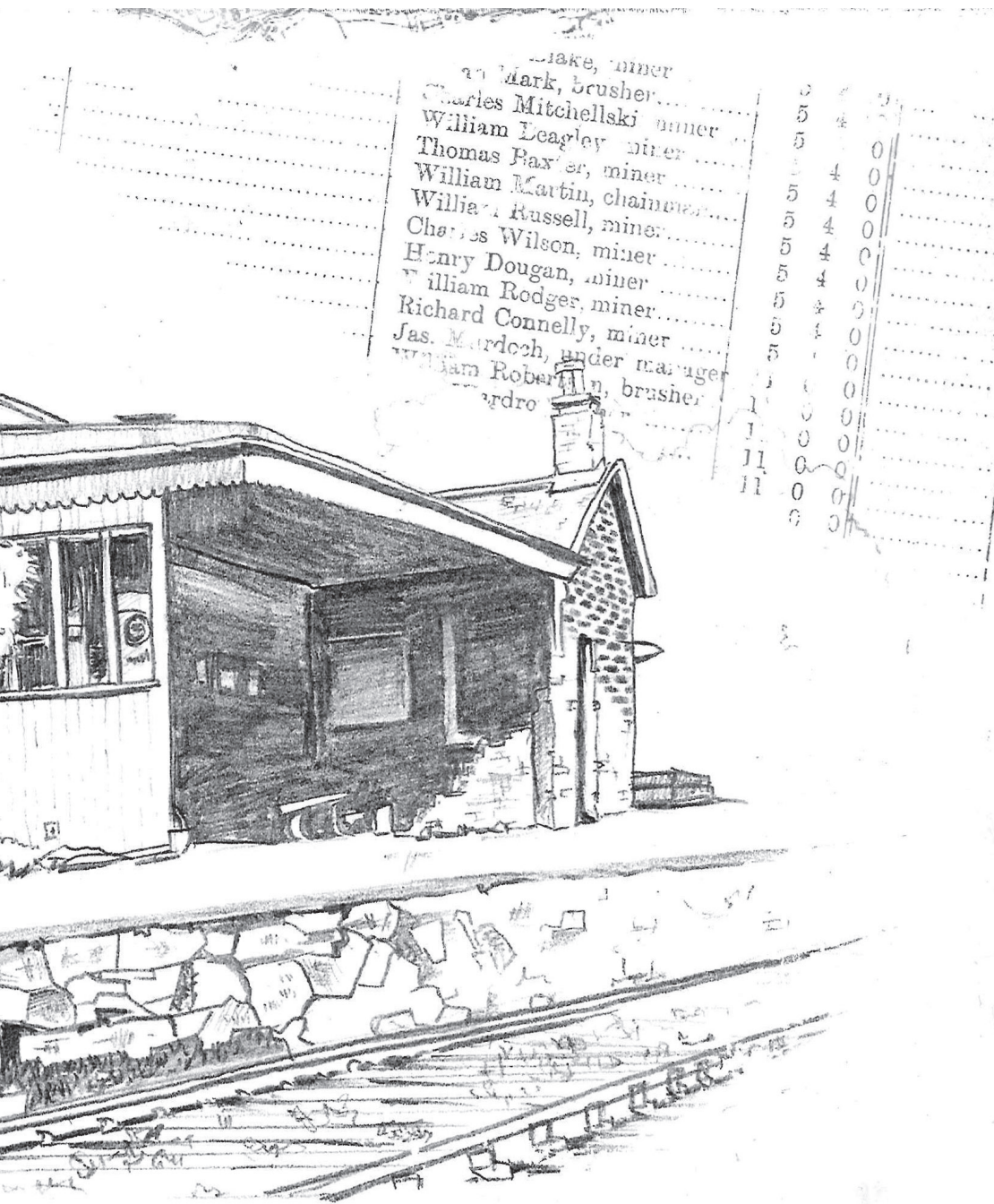
PLATE IV.—COMPARATIVE VERTICAL SECTIONS OF THE MILLSTONE GRIT SERIES AND UPPER LIMESTONE GROUP

1.—Generalised from bores.

2.—Above 80 fathoms mainly generalised from bores, partly from natural sections; remainder from bore near Boghead House 912; remainder generalised from Couston bore (Bainuir Farm) 107, 17; remainder from old bore at Milnerson. For Volcanic rocks in Couston bore see Plate III.

STATION MASTER





Blake, miner
Mark, brusher
Charles Mitchellski miner
William Beagley miner
Thomas Baxter, miner
William Martin, chainman
William Russell, miner
Charles Wilson, miner
Henry Dougan, miner
William Rodger, miner
Richard Connelly, miner
Jas. Murdoch, under manager
William Robertson, brusher
Rodro

5	0	0	0
5	4	0	0
5	4	0	0
5	4	0	0
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5	4	0	0
5	4	0	0
5	4	0	0
5	4	0	0
1	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
0	0	0	0

(L) - THE MR BOLTON
(R) - F. GILLIES
er from bo...
sed from old...



2. GARDEN CITY & BENTS CORNER

Garden City

Announcement by John M'Kie, Secretary, West Lothian Housing Society, Ltd. (1915)

The directors of the recently formed West Lothian Housing Society, Limited, which includes most of the gentlemen interested in the progress of Armadale, Blackridge and Whitburn, have decided to make a new departure in the manner of providing houses for the working classes.

Hitherto in large industrial centres the usual plan has been to build large blocks of houses and make privies common to all householders, and where washhouses existed these, too, were as a rule wholly inadequate. The result in most cases was far from ideal.

The directors of the new company are to change all this and they are at present asking estimates for the building of houses on the garden city principle at Bents, near Bents Station.

Each house is to be self-contained. There is a back and front entrance, each house has within itself a bathroom, coal cellar, and washing-house, and between the front and back gardens there is a strong dividing fence. Thus each family is isolated, and chances for disputes among neighbours is reduced to almost vanishing point.

Further open spaces are the rule, and between blocks of houses there will be ample carriage ways.

The style of architecture, if not unduly ornate, is artistic and should help to make occupiers take a pride in keeping everything outside and inside the house clean and tidy.

The buildings will be of brick with rough cast, back and front and sides, while the fronts of the houses will be done up with ornamental doors and windows.

Bents Corner

Davie Lawrence - Miner's Son (1950)

Miners have very little leisure time, but what free time they do have is filled with a variety of activities. Long hours spent underground makes the miner especially keen on spending his leisure time in the open air.

Bents Corner is the place where the men meet. Hairy Corner, in the Auld Rows, is where the men from the Stoneyburn end meet and talk. They sit on their *hunkers* to smoke and play cards and gamble.

Manny Shinwell came to talk to the men at Bents Corner, when he was trying to get elected as a Labour candidate. Later, he was mainly remembered, not for his rhetoric, but for cadging *baccy* for his pipe from the men.

Tobacco came in a solid *plug* in those days. You paired off flakes with a knife, then ground the flakes down between your palms and packed this 'rub' into your pipe. When I was a lad, a man called 'Dabber' McNeil used to wave his big baccy knife at the kids to scare us, just for a laugh.





When you work underground, you form a close community. The darkness, the remoteness of the coal-face and the constant danger, breeds a solidarity among the men that is very powerful. That's what makes the miners stick together in hard times and work to make life better for themselves and their families, by clubbing together in associations like the Co-operative and the Miners' Welfare. This solidarity is forged underground. When the men come up into the light, they may blink away the *stour* and darkness of the pit, but they hold on tight to that strong sense of community.

Men go to the pub and drink in order to continue this intimacy with their workmates. Likewise, they gather at Bents Corner and sit on their 'hunkers' to smoke and gamble. They smoke and talk endlessly, but their talk's always about world affairs and politics rather than the hard facts of money and domestic woes - the very troubles they flee to Bents Corner to get away from.

The men escape from the house as soon as they can. They rove the countryside, just for the feel of it. They keep and race dogs and pigeons. They play or watch football, quoits, bowls, badminton, tennis; they sing in the choir or play in the band. Some love their gardens, and not just for the vegetables they grow to supplement their diets, but from a genuine love of the beauty of flowers. And many like to just sit on their heels and watch — just watch, anything or nothing.

The Miners' Rows

From the Diary of Georgina Hannah, Teacher (1918)

In earlier times, the colliers lived principally in the old miners' rows. The first miner's rows were a dreary and featureless place, with outside washhouses and privies, and not much in the way of paving, so that in wet weather the surrounding ground was often churned up into a morass of semi-liquid mud, which added to the housewife's burden of trying to keep a clean house.

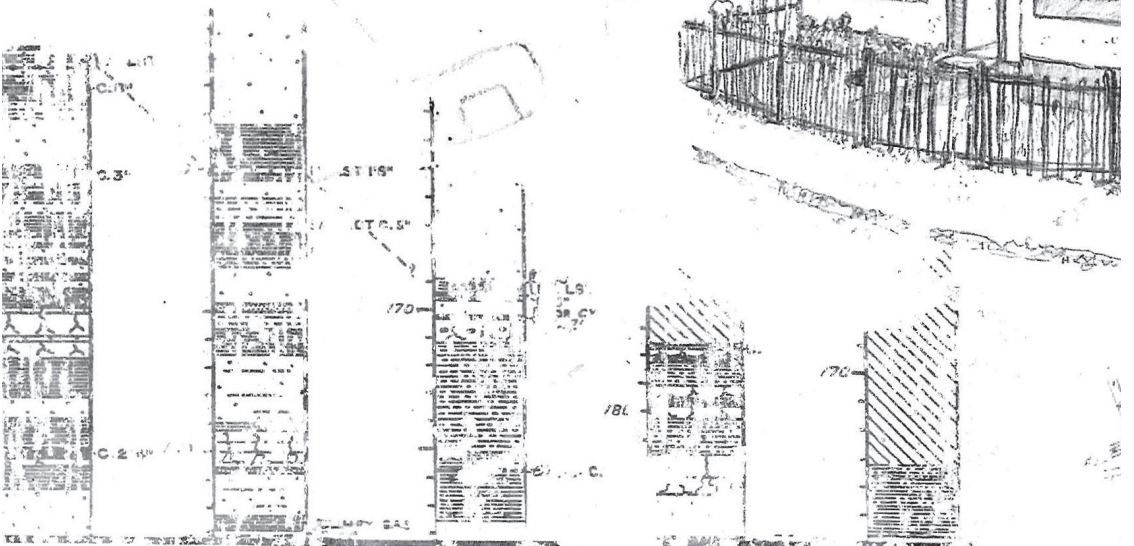
The rows were mainly constructed of two types of house. The older constructions were either a single-end or but-and-ben, according to whether it had one room or two. Each dwelling had only one door, and the back wall only had a small window; so that there was not much in the way of ventilation. Many of them had leaky roofs, damp walls, broken plaster and cracks in the walls. The impossibility of domestic cleanliness and order where this was the case needs no elaboration.

Where the men in a house were on different shifts, the task of the housewife was complicated by irregular meals and sleeping-hours. If the pit was a wet one, the miners' soaking clothes had to be left at night by the kitchen fire; and as the kitchen is also a sleeping apartment, the steam and gas which were given off as the pit clothes dried was highly injurious to the children, who often slept in one of the two large beds nearby.

In the absence of baths at the pithead or in any save the newer houses, the miner on his return had to take his bath in the scullery (if there was one) or in the inevitable publicity of the kitchen. With this accumulation of difficulties to contend with, the standard of cleanliness and neatness that could be attained in many houses (though by no means in all) is a matter for genuine surprise and admiration. In the numerous cases, however, in which water had not been introduced into the houses, but had to be fetched from a standpipe at the end of the row, a high standard of cleanliness could not be looked for.

However, new houses are being built, thanks to the philanthropy of our more enlightened mine owners and to progressive associations such as the West Lothian Housing Society, Limited. These are a great improvement on the type of house heretofore built for the workmen employed in collieries in this district. They are well built, well finished, and are being eagerly sought after by the workmen.

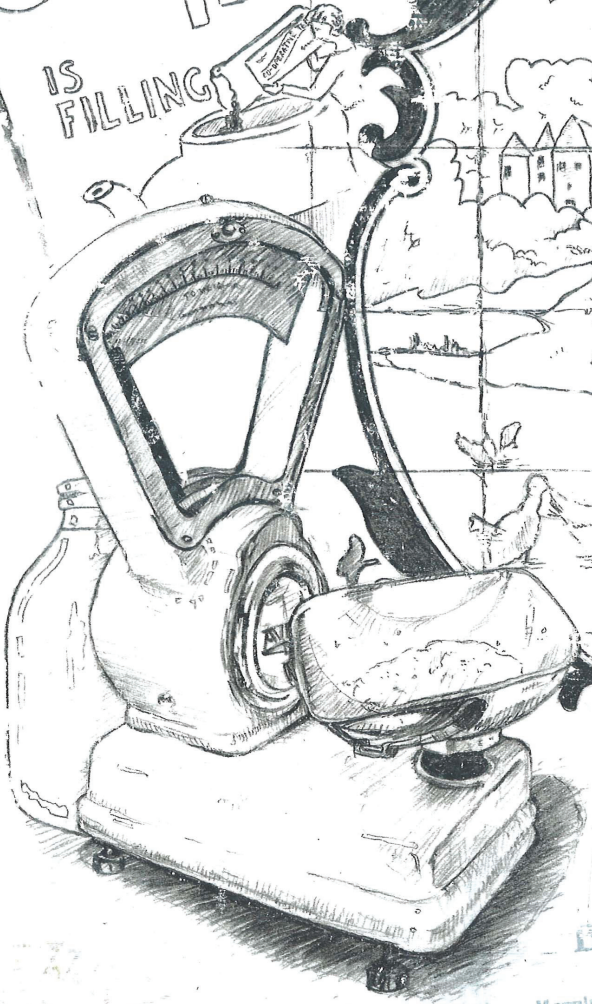






CO-OPERATIVE
TEA

IS
FILLING



Crofthead Co-operative Society
Limited.
Fauldhouse.

Grocery, Bread, Fleshing, Bootmaking, and
Departments.



DECORATED TILES ON THE BACK WALL
OF CROFTHEAD CO-OPERATIVE STORE.

Branch at Bents.

Morning Delivery of Rolls & Pasteurised Milk.
Bread and Fleshing Vans call regularly.
BEST QUALITY OF GOODS KEPT.

ASSOCIATION OF CHINA OR
SOUTH AFRICAN MAIN COAL

3. CO-OP STORES

Margaret Tweedie (age 10)

Hello! My name's Margaret Tweedie. I'm 10 years old. I help my mum by getting her shopping for her on a Saturday.

I take two bags to the Store. I go round all the counters, get the groceries, whatever she wants...and she always tell me that, when I get to the bakery counter, 'If there's anything nice, get it!' Then I have to bring that shopping back (seeing as I'm just a wee lassie), carrying the two heavy shopping bags. Then I have to go back up the road to get to the fruit and vegetables - half-a-stone or a stone of potatoes, vegetables for the soup, and whatever fruit we can get. It's hard work, but we're used to hard work in Stoneyburn.

And I have to remember my mum's Dividend number. My mum would murder me if I ever forgot the number. When you give them your money, they write down your Store number and how much you paid. There are four different shops and you have to do that all the way around. Same at the fruit shop, same at the butcher's shop, same at the grocer's shop, same at the draper's. Mum saves up her Dividend and uses it every year to get me and my sisters new coats and shoes for the school. She's told me all about the Store. It was set up by working people to help working people have decent food and clothes, and not have to go without. All the profits the Store makes are shared among the members, depending to how much they've spent. That's the Dividend.

My mum's all for the Co-operative.

Margaret Tweedie (age 14)

Hello! It's me again! Margaret Tweedie. I'm 14 now and I've left the school, and you'll never guess where I'm working...

Aye, I went to work in the Store!

I'm not long started and I do all of the jobs you do when you start in a shop. I scrub the floors, fill the shelves, carry through the big sacks of tatties and the sides of bacon, which have to be cut up... anything that needs doing.

Once I've been here a while, I'll get to serve at a counter. Then I'll have to weigh everything - the sugar, all the different dried goods - and cut and weigh the butter and cheese and bacon.

You can buy anything at the Store. The men buy everything they need for work, like their piece tins, boots, clothes, and even the *carbide* for their lamps - everything except their tools, which they get the blacksmith at the pit to make for them. According to Mr Lorimer, the Stoneyburn Branch Manager, you can even buy gunpowder in some branches, but not in Stoneyburn.

Mr Lorimer's been telling me all about the Store - or 'The Stoneyburn Branch of the West Calder Co-operative Society', to give it its posh name.

Stoneyburn originally came under the Addiewell Branch. However, as Stoneyburn got bigger with the development of the coalfield, the West Calder Society Board decided to open a Branch in the village itself, back in 1915, during the War. In its first year, the Stoneyburn Branch had 257 members and sales totalling £20,604. That's an awful lot of money. A lot more than my dad could earn in a lifetime.

As trade increased, the original premises got too small; so they got a site at the West End, where they built new 'state-of-the-art' shops to house a Grocery Department, a Drapery and Footwear Department, and a Butcher's. The original shop became a Fruit and Confectionery Department.

I love working in the Store. I know most of the customers. They're all from Bents or Stoneyburn. Though, truth be told, the folk from Bents and Stoneyburn don't really mix that much.





4. ORIGINAL MINE

Starting At The Pit

Jim Bryden (age 14)

When I turned 14, I left the school and went to work at the pit-head. Left school on the Friday and went up with my dad on the Monday to get a job. That's how it went.

I mind my first day. It was snowing heavily. I mind walking along the railway behind my dad and there were big drifts at the side of the line. And I fell into a big drift, so I was soaking wet even before I started.

There's little choice in what work you can get in Stoneyburn when you leave school. The Cooperative Society is a big employer, as it runs the majority of shops in the village, including the butchery department and the dairy, both of which employ boys. However, most boys have little choice in the matter of where they're going to work. The decision's made for you by your dad.

As soon as you're old enough to leave school, it's important you get a job as quickly as possible. Miners' families can be quite large, and your mother's keen to get the extra wages to help make ends meet. I'm the oldest boy in my family, so when I left school it was my job to go to the pits and start earning, and to earn as much as I could to help the family.

I started at the pithead. Your first job at the pit is always on the surface, at the pithead where the coal is processed for transportation. There are lots of different jobs on the surface.

My first job was at the sorting tables. The *hutches* carrying the coal come up and tip their loads onto vibrating tables, like big sieves or riddles. The small pieces of coal, or *dross*, falls through the tables, while the bigger pieces carry on to the picking tables. At the picking tables, the boys pick out stone and dirt from the coal, and then a conveyor belt takes the coal onto more screens, where the coal's sorted into different sizes.

In some places, women and girls work on the sorting tables, including Stoneyburn.

You can also be given the job of emptying the coal hutches onto the sorting tables as they come up from underground; 'tumbling the hutches', as it's called.

Some work in the wood yard as their first job. This involves unloading wood as it arrives into the colliery, loading trucks with wood props to go to the top of a shaft, and then re-loading the wood into the cage to be sent down the pit.

Preparing pit props for the mine is also done in the wood yard. These wooden props are used to support the roof in the mines, and have to be stripped of their bark and cut to size for use underground.

We boys are also expected to do any general work that needs to be done. You can be sent to any job. The first thing you learn when you start work at the pit is that, if you get told to go to a certain place in the pit, you jump to it.

Boys do two years on the surface after they first arrive at the Colliery at age 14. When I'm 16, I'll be allowed to go underground, but not to the *face*. You don't get to work at the face until you're 18 years old.



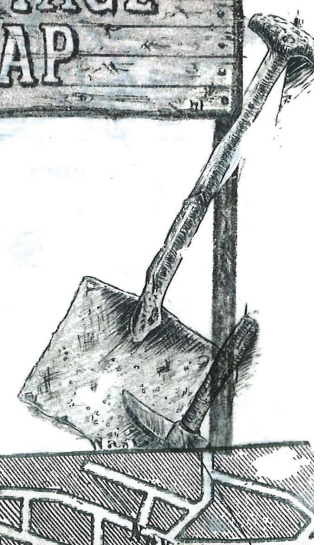




9 in. to 1 6
 10 in. to 1 4
 1 in. to 0 2
 2 ft. 2 in. to 2



STONEYBURN
 HERITAGE
 MAP





Starting Down The Pit

Jim Bryden (age 16)

Before going underground, you have to get kitted out. You have to provide your own steel toe-capped boots and boiler suits, as well as your working tools. Safety helmets with lamps are provided, which run on carbide and which you buy at the Cooperative Store. I used to be sent to the Store, when I was a wee laddie, to buy my dad's. I used to get a row when I got home for dropping wee pinches of the carbide into the puddles to see it fizz.

Once you're dressed to go underground, you pick up your token or 'tally'. The tokens come in sets of two, one square and one round, and are numbered. Everyone who goes underground collects two tokens. Before you go into the cage to go down, you give one token to the banksman, who works at the pithead, and keep the other token. The banksman hangs the tokens up on a board. At the end of the shift, when you return to the surface, you return your token to the board, hanging it beside the token the banksman hung up. This means, at the end of a shift, if there's only one token in place, someone's gone missing.

Most of the boys are from mining families, so they know what they're letting themselves in for. However, that first trip underground is still quite scary. The cage drops like a stone and rattles off the sides as it goes down. The smell is horrible, not just from the coal and the *foasty* atmosphere of the pit, but also because there are no toilets underground. There are the rats and the mice to deal with too. Not that rats and mice are new to us. Mice are fairly common in the rows, as are rats in the *middens*. What I remember most about my first day underground was the darkness and the dampness. But you soon get used to it all.

My first job underground was as a supply boy. Supply boys bring the supplies down from the surface, while the wood boys take the supplies into the face-line. In addition to our official jobs, there are other jobs that the boys do for the miners. The miners at the face-line are paid for the distance they go each day, so they don't want to waste their time doing things they can get the boys to do for them. 'Can boys' are a good example of this.

Can boys go to the 'powder-house', which is some distance from the main area of the pit for safety reasons, and collect the number of gunpowder cans required by miners at the face-line and take these cans to them. At the end of the day they take the empty cans back. We get paid for this by the miners. With 20 colliers on a face-line, this can be a nice bit of extra money.





Occupational Training

Wullie McFadyean - Miner (1957)

When you did your underground training, they'd ask you "Do you want to be an engineer or anything?" So people who'd left school at 15 could end up as electricians or engineers or blacksmiths. If you got a chance, you took it and got a trade.

When it came in, the National Coal Board gave everyone a chance to progress to something. They trained a lot of good engineers, electricians... you name it... and they never got the credit for it. Men then went on to other industries and benefitted those other industries with the training that the Coal Board - the taxpayer - gave them. The Coal Board probably did more training in this country at that time than any other single employer.

It was a mixture of on-the-job and college training. You went to your job in the pit and you went to night-school through the week. They gave you day-release and paid all the tuition fees for various college courses as well. There was a lot of money spent then, that's not there now, for training young people.

Being a miner was very difficult, and I don't mean just with the hard work. You had to have your wits about you, and you had to have a great deal of intelligence to be a miner and work underground. These miners were all skilled at their job, even supposing they weren't tradesmen like electricians and the like. Just to work coal you had to be a skilled man. You didn't just go in there and shovel coal without thought or anything. You wouldn't have lasted very long if you had!

There were specialists within the mines. There were *strippers*, there were *brushers*, there were *pan-shifters*, *roadsmen*, *shankers*. Names that don't mean anything at all to most people now - but those were all skilled jobs. They all required a great deal of expertise, quite apart from the physical effort.

On Friday nights the can boys wait for the miners outside the pay hall to collect their tips. Most of the men just tip the small change out of their pay poke and you get that. If someone doesn't pay up, you go to the Spokesman. Each face-line has a Spokesman or Leading Man, who sorts out minor disputes underground. If you don't get paid as agreed, the Spokesman will tell the offending miner to carry his own can until he's 'squared-up' with his boys. If this doesn't work, the miner's just left to get on with things himself. It's a system that works well on the whole.

We're also taught the haulage system in the mine; how the coal hutches are pulled along using a combination of wire ropes and chains. Much of the haulage work in the pit involves sheer brute strength, and it's dangerous. The wire ropes can break and the hutches run out of control. I've already seen men get crushed by runaway hutches.

You always have to watch your step when you're working underground.



TRAPPED

It's dark. The space is so small that the light from the carbide lamp on my helmet only draws attention to how dark it is. The light doesn't seem to carry far. My breath is loud in my ears, and raggedy from the effort of squirming through the tunnel. The only other sounds I can hear are the scrape of my jacket along the floor, the walls and the ceiling, the slosh of the puddles I'm having to crawl through, the rattle of the chain I'm dragging, and Bobbie puffing, out of breath, behind me. Bobbie isn't long started underground; he's not used to how hard going it is. But he'll learn.

My name's Billy Howden and I'm a mining engineer from Stoneyburn. Bobbie Russell is my apprentice. We're marking off the sections of a new coal-face the miners are going to work. The chain I'm dragging is for measuring the sections.

We're making good progress, even though the tunnel's only about 50 centimetres square. It'll get wider as the miners work it, but not any higher. It's a tight squeeze. I'm having to pull myself along on my forearms, wriggling like a worm. My clothes are soaked through, with the water that seeps down through the rock and gathers along the tunnel floor. The tunnel's been dug so that there's always a draught running through it, to blow away any gas that's trapped in the coal seam. It's never cold underground, but this draught and my wet clothes means I'm chilled to the bone. I can't wait to get the job done, and get back up to the surface to try and dry out a bit.

"Billy?"

"What?"

"I'm stuck!"

"You're stuck?"

"Aye."

"How can you be stuck?"

"I'm stuck. I can't move, forward or back. My shoulders are wedged tight against the sides, and my back's right up against the roof."

"I can't help you, Bobbie, there's not enough room for me to turn around. Try and relax your muscles. Don't bunch them up. And breathe all the air out of your lungs. Make yourself as small as possible."

There's a pause.

"No use, Billy. I'm still stuck." A note of desperation has entered Bobbie's voice. "Do something, Billy!"

"Now, don't panic, son. You'll be all right. If you panic, you'll just make things worse."

Bobbie's beginning to sob now. "Please, Billy, get me out of here. I don't want to be buried alive."

"That's not going to happen, son. Look, don't struggle so hard. Relax your muscles as much as you can, breathe out, and pull yourself along on your elbows."

"I can't move, Billy. Help! Get me out of here."

He's lost it. He's in a blind panic. Och, now his helmet's fallen off and his lamp's gone out. He's in pitch darkness. He's greeting now.

"Calm down, Bobbie. Do you hear me? Calm down. I'm going to try to turn around and come back to help you. We'll soon get you out of there."



I crawl a few more metres and find a small recess in the wall, that's been hollowed out to house a pit-prop. I cram my back into gap. Now I can lie on my side and pull my knees up to my chest.

I curl up in a tight ball and try to do a kind of sideways somersault. It's no good. There's just not enough room. I curl up tighter... my head tucked between my knees. The bones in my spine... feel... like... they're going to pop. All the... air's... being crushed out of my lungs. If... If I get stuck too... we'll be in a right pickle. Oh... my... This isn't funny...! One... final... shove... and...

There! Now I'm facing back the way I came.

I'll take a few moments to get my breath back, then I'll start to wriggle back along the tunnel to Bobbie.

His screams are filling the small space between us. It sounds like a wave trying to push me back.

"Bobbie! Will you shut up! I'm on my way. We'll soon get you out of there."

There he is, in the light of my lamp. His face is black with coal-dust. His eyes are white and wide with terror. The water's slowly gathering in front of him; he's blocking its escape route through the tunnel.

"Right, Bobbie. Let's see what we've got here."

He's well and truly stuck, right enough, like a cork in a bottle. I try to shove him back, but he won't budge. I try to pull him towards me, but he's wedged tight.

"What are you going to do, Billy? I don't want to drown."

"Don't worry. We'll sort it out."

I thrust my hands under his chest. I can feel a couple of centimetres of loose coal and dross banked up beneath him. I start to scoop them out, shovelling them behind me with my hands.

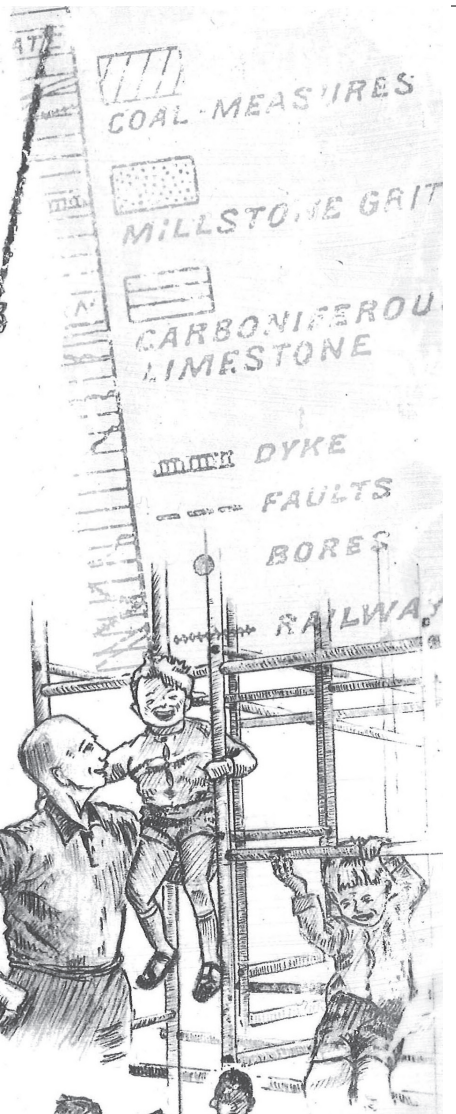
"You've pushed up a wee bank of dross in front of you as you've been crawling through. That's what's got you stuck. It's packed up underneath you and crammed you against the roof. Once I've cleared it out, we'll be on our way again."

Bobbie's beginning to calm down. It's been an ordeal for him, right enough. But it's all part of his education underground. He'll know the next time he's wriggling through a tunnel that he has to clear any debris to the sides and not just try to crawl over it.

"Are we going out now, Billy?" Bobbie asks, now I've got myself turned around again and we've resumed our worm-like journey.

"Oh, no! No way! We've still got these sections to mark off. Get a move on. It'll soon be 'piece' time."





BETTY WALKER



5. THE PUBLIC PARK

The ball I threw while playing in the park has not yet reached the ground.

- Dylan Thomas

First comes the park-keeper to unlock the gate of a world within the world of Stoneyburn, full of treasures, born of pit and community; an iron-railed universe of swings and chutes, paths and rhododendrons and grass one must keep off. First comes the park-keeper with his silver whistle.

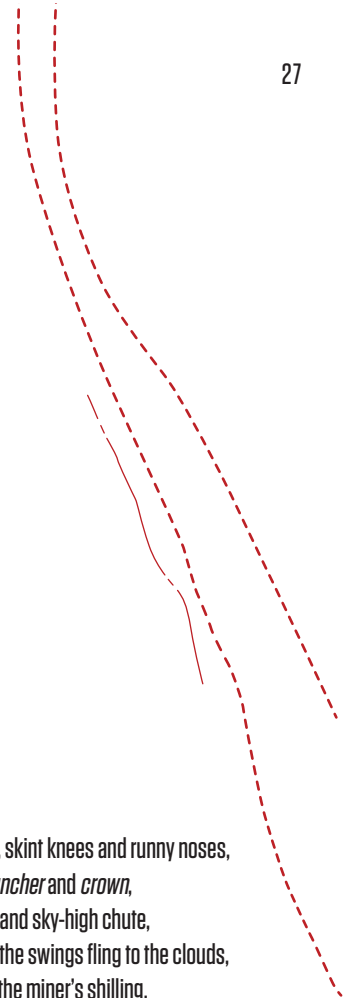
Second come the mothers with their encumbrances of prams and weans, to *pauchle* time from keeping house, the washing and drying, the feeding and worry, to laugh and *blether* on embrasured benches set into shrubberies and floral borders. Second comes the sisterhood with its encumbrances.

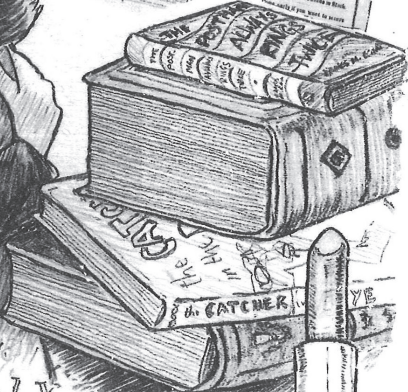
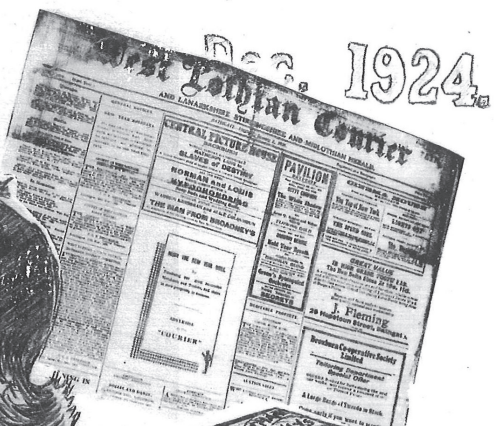
Third come the weans, new-minted surveyors, discovering the seams their lives will mine in the still extraordinary beauty of ordinary things: a daisy, a stone, the simple engineering of pendulum and lever, of their own small arms and legs. Third come the weans with their possibilities.

Fourth come the rascals, skint knees and runny noses, to test their mettle on *duncher* and *crown*, on *beamer* and *pancake* and sky-high chute, with shrieks and shouts the swings fling to the clouds, all made and paid for by the miner's shilling. Fourth come the rascals with their long tig-chains.

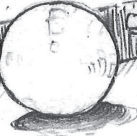
Fifth come the bowlers in their flannels and blazers, gliding the sanctum of the baize-like green, close-clipped and rolled, from their Art Deco clubhouse with its *gallus* geometry and shuttlecock height, which we tip-toe past - *wheesh!* - to reach the tennis courts. Fifth come the sportsmen to play between shifts.

Last comes the merriment of the Children's Gala, marching class after class behind bands and banner, for milk and a cake and a *thrupenny* bit and races and a shot on Codonas' travelling shows; a day for the sunshine to banish the pit-mirk. Last comes Stoneyburn, celebrating its *smeddum*.





A GRAND ASSEMBLY
BY BLACK LADIES.
Gentlemen. 1/6. Ladies. 6d





6. THE INSTITUTE AND WELFARE HALL

Jock Walker - Caretaker

Aye, we have a braw Institute in Stoneyburn. I'm the caretaker there, you know. It was gifted to the village by the mine owners, the Baillies of Polkemmet, as a meeting place where the working man might improve himself.

It's a trim wee building, built in much the same style as the Public School. It has a reading room, a billiard room and a refreshment room - though there's no alcohol allowed in the Institute, the Baillies being strong against it. It's run by a committee, and all the miners pay a wee contribution towards its upkeep through their wages, same as the Park. In many ways, the Institute is the heart of the community.

The only drawbacks are that the Institute's just for the men and it doesn't have a decent-sized hall. Big meetings still have to be held in Paton's Picture Palace. And children aren't allowed in the door at the Institute. Even if they're down here with their fathers, the children have to wait outside while their fathers go in. Women aren't allowed either.

After the First World War, a Royal Commission looked into the condition of mining communities all over the country and a Miner's Welfare Fund was set up to provide things like communal baths, educational scholarships and welfare halls. This led to the building of the Welfare Hall in Stoneyburn, just round from the Institute, which has a good-sized hall for dancing, concerts and other socials, and where things like the annual Children's Treat are held, and a lesser hall for classes and meetings.

Oh, aye - it's popular, is the Welfare!



THE MINERS' WELFARE

Wullie McFadyean - Miner

Every year, we'd have a Childrens' Treat that would beat any modern-day trips to Disneyland. All us kids were spruced up, best clothes and Brylcreemed hair, to attend the great feast.

The venue was the Welfare Hall. Tables and chairs were laid out in two big lines, bigger than for any birthday party. Food came along with drinks, and there were no parents to tell you what you should eat first. This was heaven on earth!

After the party, it was time to slide about on the hardwood floor, while the grown-ups cleared our mess up. Then the room was set out for the picture show. We all sat in lines on the dance floor while the films were projected onto a screen on the stage. Cartoons, some in colour but most in black and white. Pure magic!

Then we all went home with a goody bag and half a crown.

One of the best times, though, was the Queen's Coronation. The whole village was decked out with flags and bunting. The Silver Band led all the children in a procession to the Welfare Hall, where Mr. Paton entertained us with a film show. Just after 11 o'clock, we all listened to the Coronation ceremony through loudspeakers that Alexander's, the local radio dealer, had brought in and set up in the Hall. Then it was off to the Public Park, where we all got a souvenir mug, a box of chocolates and a shiney new sixpence.

Later on that day, the Welfare held an Old Folks' Treat, followed in the evening by a Coronation Dance. Bonfires were lit in both Bents and Stoneyburn, and the day was rounded off with a fantastic fireworks display.

Aye, the Welfare is the real social centre of the community. The pictures are on there six nights a week, a different picture every night, with two showings, one for the children and one for the adults. It's Mr. Paton that has them. Before the Welfare, he had Paton's Picture House beside St Quentin's, where he lived. After the pictures on a Friday, there's the late-night dancing, which is always packed with would-be Fred Astaires and Ginger Rodgers, strutting their stuff. And on Sundays there's the highlight of the week - the variety concerts, with acts from all over Scotland. The Welfare also organises Go As You Please talent nights, where local talent can have a go at breaking into the big time.

That's all held in the Big Hall. There's always plenty happening in the Lesser Hall too. That's where local groups, like the Silver Band and the Women's Guild, meet. I used to go to first aid classes there, every Monday night, where we'd mummify our mates and learn bandaging techniques for all sorts of catastrophic injuries. We learned some important stuff, but it was seldom put into practice - except, maybe, for the odd bleeding nose.

It was good though. It helped when I started at the pit. We had to take our First Aid tickets, and I was already well clued-up on the subject.





8. PATON'S PICTURE PALACE

A Night At The Pictures

Margaret Tweedie - Shop Assistant

A night at the pictures! And who cares what film you see?

You want to get up to the pictures early to avoid the queues. So right after tea I'll start to get ready. Face washed and make-up carefully applied; hair brushed until it shines and is arranged in the latest style; stockings checked to see that the seams are straight; shoes polished until they gleam, and matching handbag rubbed with a duster to remove any marks. Then it's on with my best clothes, complete with gloves (no girl ever goes out without gloves these days), then off I'll go to the pictures with my girlfriends.

Nights at the pictures are more a case of being seen than going to see the film. If you haven't already *clicked* you might be lucky at the pictures. The courting couples always race to the back where they can kiss and cuddle in the darkness, while the rest of us parade around or chat to friends until it's time for the picture to start. This ritual allows everyone to tell who's going steady, and there's often a lot of changing of seats as boys and girls pair off before the picture starts. All the girls make a point of taking off their coats to show off their trim figures. Mind you, some would do better to keep their coats on!

Our clothes are almost like a uniform, the only difference being in the colours we choose. The boys are no better with their suits, each trying to outdo the other, with their hair liberally plastered with Brylcreem or Brilliantine. Some use so much that it often trickles down their ears. They spend more time than we girls do in front of the mirror, carefully arranging their hair into shape. They comb the front as high as possible and carefully smooth the back into shape. I think they're even vainer than the girls as they strut around like peacocks, continually combing their hair and checking their reflections in shop windows.

Smoking is the 'in thing'. It's so glamorous - all the big stars do it in the films and the newsreels. Most of us wouldn't go anywhere without our cigarettes. Girls never smoke on the street, but as soon as they get into the pictures they light up. Players are the first choice of cigarette, then Woodbines. You can buy single Woodbines at Billy's Bug House - Paton's - as you go in. By the time the picture starts a pall of smoke hangs over the entire audience. My parents don't like me smoking, so I do all my smoking at the pictures, at the dancing or in my friend's houses. And I always make sure that I've plenty of mints to get rid of the smell.

If you get a click at the pictures, you'll then be walked home by the boy. But if not, you just go home with those of your friends who are also on their lonesomes, commiserating with one another over the fact that we didn't get a boyfriend this week. Or laughing about the ones who fancy us but we wouldn't be seen dead with. There's always the next week.

Then it's chips from Galloway's and up home to listen to the wireless for a bit, before turning into bed.

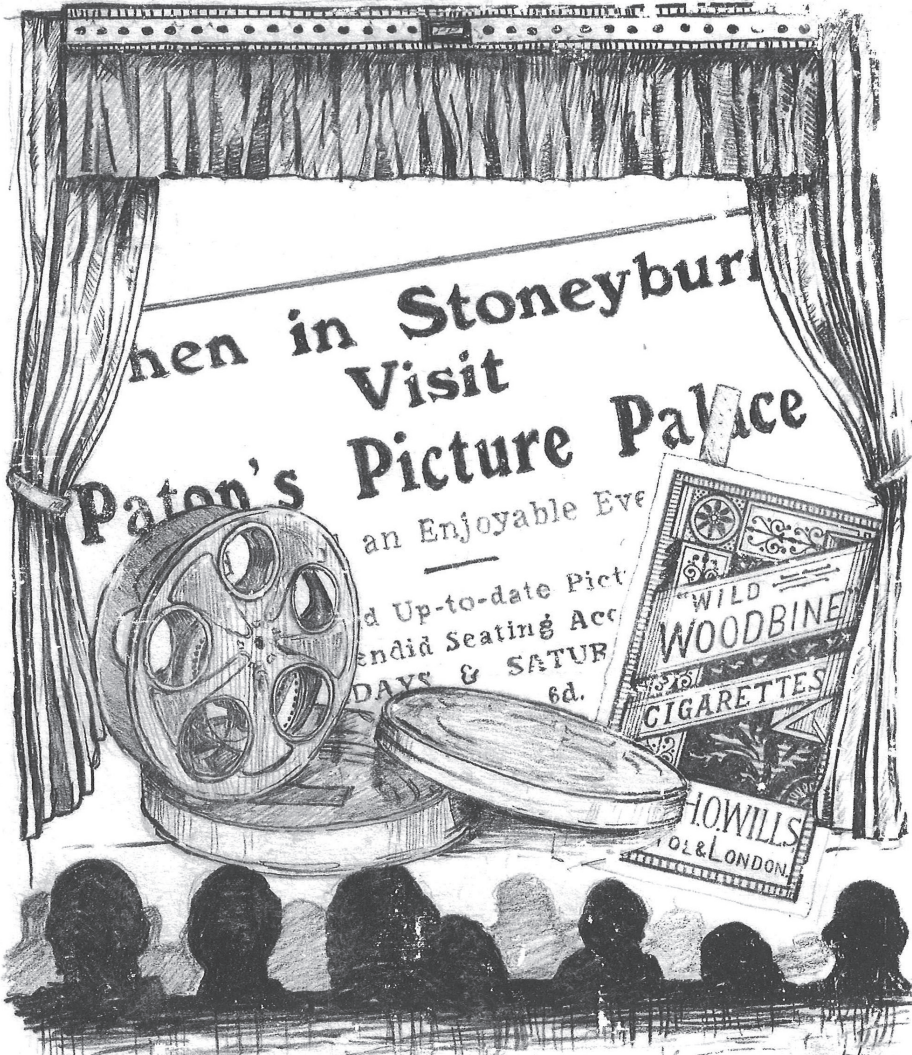


Detailed description of the drawing...

More size (near Birmingham)

Waterloo Collieries

Waterloo Collieries		Fl. In.	Blues or fakes	Fl. In.
adstone	0 1/2 to 1	6	Coal	0 1/2
with rib	10 in. to 1	4	Coal	0 1/2



Mr. J. G. ...
 Mr. W. ...
 Mr. P. ...
 Mr. R. ...
 Mr. S. ...
 Mr. T. ...
 Mr. V. ...
 Mr. W. ...
 Mr. X. ...
 Mr. Y. ...
 Mr. Z. ...



9. OLD POST OFFICE





10. OLD PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mrs Murdoch

Billy Howden - Miner (1970)

The teachers seemed to spend a long time at the same school in those days.

The teacher who taught my father, in 1914, taught me in 1950. That was Mrs Murdoch - in my day. She was Miss Scott in my father's day. She taught all her life in Stoneyburn School, from when she was a trainee, right through until she retired, just before my daughter reached that stage. She was just a teenager when she taught my father, and she taught for about 50 years in the one school. And the other teachers taught for years too - Miss Thomson, Jean Stoddart... Mrs Murdoch stayed on in the village when she retired. She had the first television in Stoneyburn.

Mrs Murdoch - she could be fiery! Although she'd been there for years and taught my father, that didn't make her any softer towards me. There was no sentimentality about it.

When they brought in the revolving blackboard, with the wooden dusters (before that there was just a blackboard on an easel with bit of cloth to wipe it with), she was deadly. She sat on a high chair at her high desk; so she was elevated. Bang! The duster rattled off walls, windows... If you were sitting dozing in the back corner, she would soon wake you up with it.

Some teachers threw chalk; Mrs Murdoch threw the duster.

School Dinners

Wullie McFadyean - Miner (1957)

You could, if you wanted, get your dinner at school, but you had to pay for it. You paid half-a-crown every week, on the Monday. That worked out at sixpence a day. The teachers used to supervise.

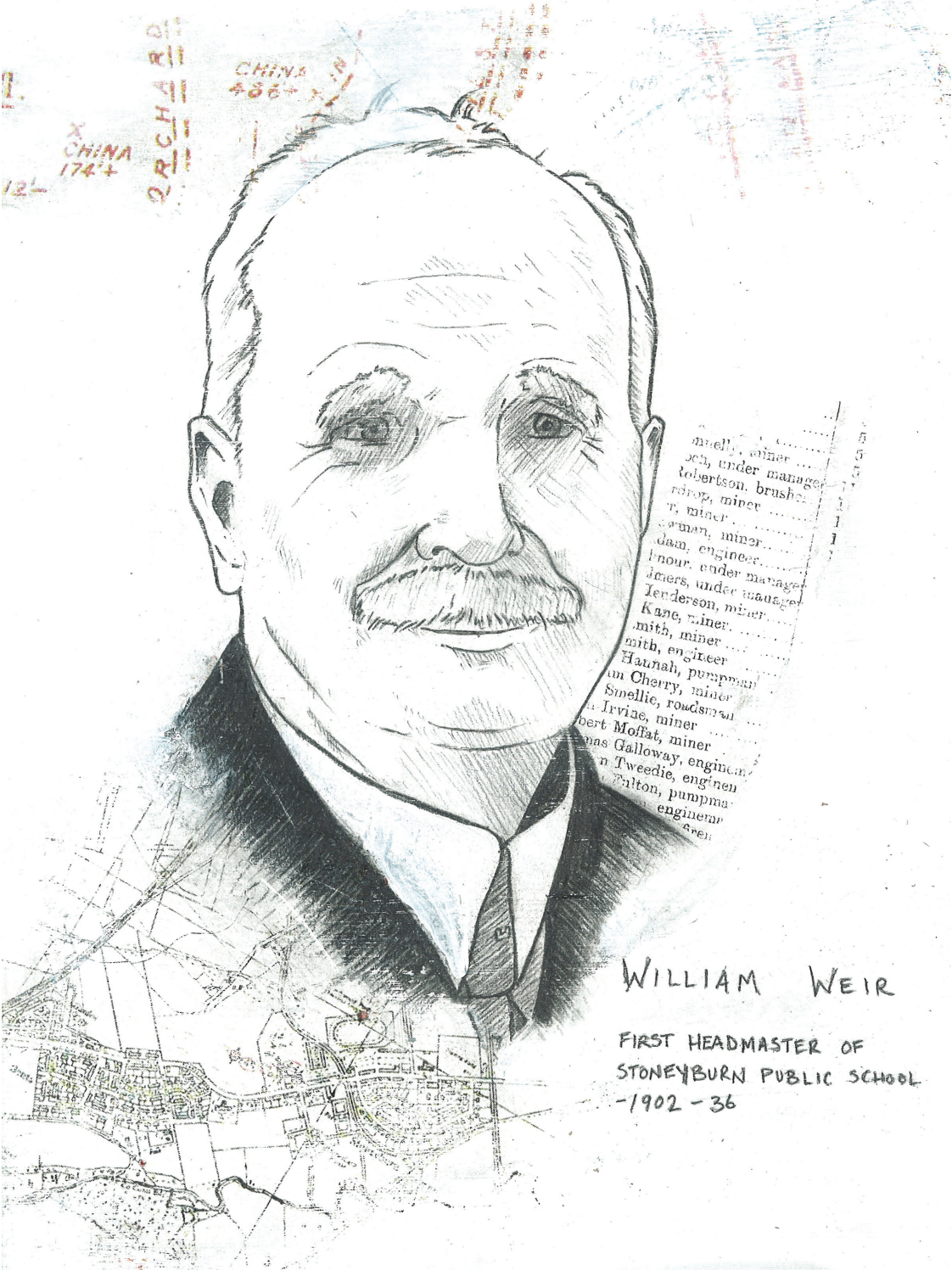
I never had school dinners, but my sister did. I used to run up the road for my piece on jam, or whatever it was. You had to if you wanted time for a game of football. It kept us kind of fit, running up and down the road like that, twice a day. There weren't many fat people going about at that time! Well, for one thing, you weren't eating all those sweet things they eat nowadays, or crisps or juice. And the games we played then too... It was all running and jumping and doing something. The lassies with their skipping ropes. All your activities at playtime were physical activities.

I remember my sister being told "Your mother's paid for it; you're going to eat it." And someone standing over her while she forced it down, until she was sick. The dinner-ladies were worse than the teachers.

It was very plain fare. You got soup some days, tatties and mince, tatties and stew, tapioca for your pudding, semolina with a spoonful of jam in it. Tapioca and semolina! 'Frogs' spawn', we use to call it. And custard - custard and sponge.

It was probably quite a good thing, though. It gave some kids the chance of actually getting something to eat, especially when times were hard.





12-
 CHINA
 174+

RICHARD

CHINA
 486+

Smellie, miner	5
Robt, under manager	5
Robertson, brusher	1
Robt, miner	1
T. miner	1
Worman, miner	1
Daan, engineer	1
Knour, under manager	1
Waters, under manager	1
Jenderson, miner	1
Kane, miner	1
Smith, miner	1
Smith, engineer	1
Hannah, pumpman	1
Cherry, miner	1
Smellie, roadman	1
Irvine, miner	1
Robert Moffat, miner	1
Thomas Galloway, engineer	1
John Tweedie, engineer	1
Patton, pumpman	1
engineer	1
486	1

WILLIAM WEIR

FIRST HEADMASTER OF
 STONEYBURN PUBLIC SCHOOL
 -1902 -36





The Qualifying

Billy Howden - Miner (1970)

You had three exams a year and report cards sent home for your parents to see. They had to sign your report card to prove you hadn't 'lost' it on the way home. When you were 11 or 12, you had your qualifying exam - the '11-plus'. A year before that, you had the Moray House test - an IQ test.

To let you understand, there were two types of secondary school set up in those days. Those who passed the qualifying exam could go to a senior secondary school. You didn't have to go if you passed, but you had the choice. Those who failed it, or didn't want to go, went to a junior secondary school instead.

Senior secondary classes include Maths, English, Latin, French and Physics. Junior secondary classes included Arithmetic, English, Science, Woodwork and Music. If you went to a senior secondary like the Lindsay or the Academy in Bathgate, you could expect to go to university or college and join a profession. If you went to a junior secondary like the one in Stoneyburn, you'd do more practical subjects and maybe, at best, go into a trade.

You were asked, "Do you want to stay on at Stoneyburn or do you want to go on to the Academy?" If you wanted to go to the Academy, you had to get good results in the qualifying. If you just wanted to stay at Stoneyburn, you didn't.

There was no pressure on us, because most of us wanted to stay at Stoneyburn anyway. We were going to be miners, earn money to help our families, and that was the finish of it.

If you went to the Academy, you had to buy the uniform. That put some folk off. A lot stayed at Stoneyburn because they didn't want to buy the uniform.

Plus, if you went to the Academy, you had to get a bus at twenty-past eight in the morning. Whereas, if you stayed at Stoneyburn, you could leave the house at ten-to-nine and still be at the school on time. Twenty-past eight? I was still in my bed at that time!

The only pressures came from your family or the teachers. Mrs Murdoch, she kind of pressurised the cleverer ones. Well, she didn't 'pressurise', but she certainly encouraged you to use your talents. It wasn't a case of, "Oh, you live in Stoneyburn/Bents. You're going to work in the pit anyway, so it doesn't matter." It wasn't like that at all. The teachers did encourage you to further your education.



Slates And Skeelies And The Strap

Billy Howden - Miner (1970)

There were about 30-odd in the class. Single wooden desks, all set out in rows, with lift-up lids and a little hole for the ink wells. Somebody would go round first thing and fill the ink wells up.

Not in primary school, of course. You didn't get pens and ink in primary school. Not in the first class anyway. You had slates and a slate pencil. When you were finished, somebody would come round with a bottle of water and splash drops onto your slate and you rubbed it clean. Some slates had lines on them. When you were learning to write you had to keep the letters inside the lines. Basically, your writing implements were slates and slate pencils - or 'skeelies', as the pencils were sometimes called. It was quite easy to write on them. But in those days they taught you to write fancy Copperplate, which was hard.

In those days, handwriting was very important and you had to do your best to write properly. And the teacher's job was to do their best to make you write properly. Nowadays, you do everything on a keyboard, so handwriting doesn't matter - legibility doesn't matter.

Moving on from slate, you had the little jotters with tramlines for practising in. Your letters had to be the same size; they had to have 'loops' and 'tails'. Sometimes the homework was to write out so many words in the jotter and then write sentences using the words. And it all had to be really perfectly done. It was no good 'dashing off' the homework, because you'd just get double the next day.

Discipline was strict. We had the strap or belt - a thick flat length of leather with two 'tongues'. If you were bad, the teacher would make you stand in front of the class and hold out your hands, flat, one cupped on top of the other; then they'd hit your hand hard, up to six times, with the belt.

Some of the lassies never, ever got the belt, but all the laddies did at some stage through the year. Some got it every day. A lot of teachers, the first thing they did when they came in was put their belt on the desk. Every teacher had their own belt, and women teachers could give the belt just as well as the men. My first teacher, Miss Marshall, she had a belt. That was Primary 1 - kids four or five years old. You got so used to it, it didn't matter after a while. It was a common, everyday occurrence. And people accepted it. Very few parents complained about corporal punishment. Again, it was common that, if you got the belt at school and if somebody told your mother, when you got home you maybe got a wee bit belt as well for not behaving yourself. Occasionally, there were certain people who would complain, but it didn't do one bit of good. To be honest, it only made things worse for the children themselves. It was better just to take it and keep quiet.

The belt was just for misbehaving, mind, or not doing your homework. If your handwriting wasn't up to scratch, or something like that, you'd just get your knuckles rapped with a ruler.

They didn't have a dunce's cap, but they might as well have done. If you were brought forward to sit in the front row, you were a 'dunce' or a 'troublemaker' - one or the other. The front row was ignominy - and within easy striking distance!

The Janitor was also the school's attendance officer. If you were off the school, he came round and chapped your door, to make sure you were ill.

One time, me and my cousin, on a Wednesday afternoon, said "Och, we'll no bother gaun ti school", and we went away down the burn to play. But the next day, the Janitor came and chapped my mother's door.

She didn't know we hadn't been to school either!

We didn't half catch it!



Going To School

Wullie McFadyean - Miner (1967)

Aye, I remember my first day at school, all those years ago. 1947, it was. I remember it because it was the only day my mum ever took me. After that first day, I had to go on my own.

When we arrived at the school that first morning, we sat in the hall with all the other new children and their mothers. Then my name was called and a teacher took me through to the classrooms. I was expecting my mum to come too, but they just shut the door and... It was the first time I'd ever been away from my mum. It was terrifying. Some kids were crying.

I lived in Bents, which was a fair walk, because Stoneyburn School was at the east end of the village and Bents is at the extreme west end. So I suppose it was half, maybe three-quarters of a mile each way. Nowadays you'd say it's not that far, but when you were only a kid, about four years old, it was quite a walk. And when you got out at 12 o'clock for your dinner, you had to run home, get your dinner, then run all the way back up again.

Some people used to take the bus down. It was a ha'penny for a child from Bents to Stoneyburn. But I don't remember ever getting the bus.

At one time, there was a local car. It belonged to the lad who was the local Registrar at the time, Geordie Beveridge. And what the local mothers did, in the Garden City, Bents, was they clubbed together and gave Geordie so much a week to take four or five or six of us in his car, down to the school. He didn't take us back. He just took us down in the morning. Everybody just piled into the car. There were no seatbelts in those day. Well, there weren't many cars on the road at that time, so the chances of crashing into any other vehicle were quite slim.

During the winter, if the weather was really, really bad, you didn't get your dinner hour. They just kept you in the school, then sent you home early. That was to save you having to go all the way home for your dinner, then all the way back in again.

In fact, there were some winters when the teacher didn't turn up because the bus couldn't get through. Then you got a day off the school. Many of the teachers came from Edinburgh. They had to come all the way out from Edinburgh on two buses - Edinburgh to Bathgate, then Bathgate to Stoneyburn, and the same back again. Quite often, if there had been a heavy fall of snow, the Bathgate to Stoneyburn road would be blocked.





GLOSSARY

Throughout the text there are some lesser known technical and Scots words which we have highlighted in italics. The meanings of these words are found here. We've not included in this glossary words still (just about!) found in a dictionary.

Piece - sandwich

Stour - dust

Hunkers - to sit on your 'hunkers' or 'haunches' is to squat down on your heels

Baccy - tobacco

Plug - a hard lump of tobacco, about the size of a Milky Way, cut from a larger 'cake'

Strippers - miners who remove the top layers of rock to expose the coal

Brushers - miners who take down the roof of the mine

Pan-shifters - miners who moved conveyer equipment, by dismantling and reassembling it as the coalface advanced

Roadsmen - miner making and maintaining the haulage roads

Shankers - miners who maintained the pit shafts or 'shanks' and sank new ones

Hutches - basket or small wagons used to transport the coal from the face

Face - the very end of the mine underground, where it is advancing into the earth

Carbide - a carbon compound used in lights

Dross - dregs / waste / debris

Foosty - smelling mouldy or stale

Rows - traditionally inferior class of houses arranged in monotonous lines

Middens - a place where rubbish gathers

Clicked - to have found a boyfriend / girlfriend

Pauchle - to 'steal' a small amount of something; e.g. a few moments of time

Blether - chat, talk

Duncher - a witches hat-shaped spinning climbing frame

Crown - roundabout

Beamer - very large plank of wood suspended at either end, that would swing backwards and forwards. Children would stand on either end and swing the beamer.

Pancake - a flat, low, spinning roundabout with nothing to hold on to

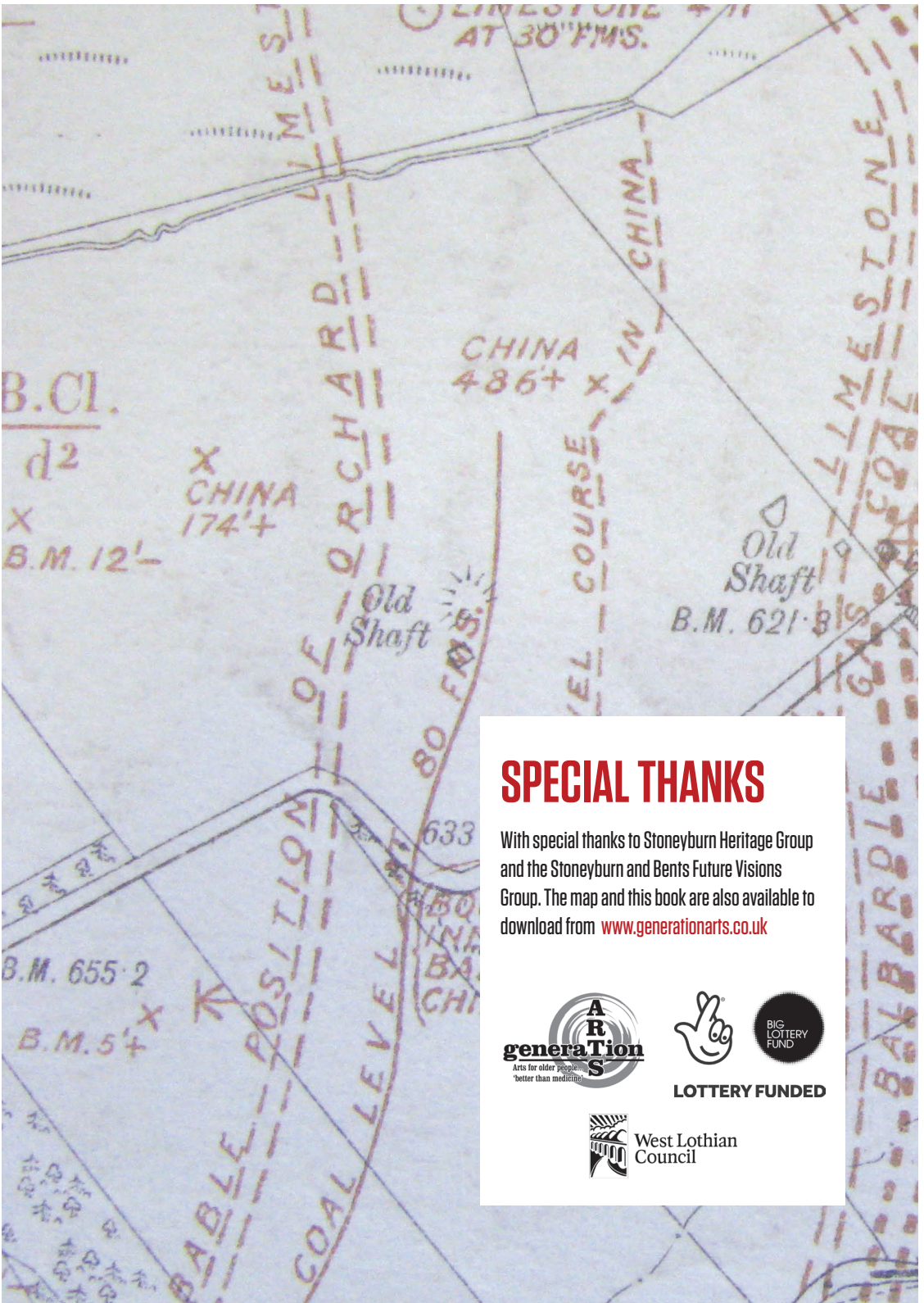
Gallus - bold / cheeky

Wheesht - like 'ssshhhhh', a sound made to hush someone

Thrupenny - a three-pence in old money, equivalent in value to just over a one pence piece in today's money

Smeddum - fine particles





SPECIAL THANKS

With special thanks to Stoneyburn Heritage Group and the Stoneyburn and Bents Future Visions Group. The map and this book are also available to download from www.generationarts.co.uk



LOTTERY FUNDED



West Lothian Council

