

Rudy Steele

Working as a miner in
Ipswich 1945-1987

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Track 01

I was born in Ipswich in 1930 and have been here all my life. My father worked in the mines and my grandfather also worked in the mines in Ipswich. My grandfather died as a result of injuries in the mine in 1930, so I never knew him. My youngest son is in the mines. He worked in the Ipswich area for quite a long while, and then he went up north because things were getting a little bit bad here. He is now down in Mudgee in the mines.

The mines have changed a lot since I went in there. Well, I started in the mines in 1945 at Blackheath. I worked on the surface. I never went underground there.

How old were you then?

I was 15. I left the mines and I retired from the mining industry in 1987, so I had 42 years in the mines.

At Blackheath I worked only on the surface, I was a clipper.

What's that?

A clipper is - they had two endless haulages, which means the rope doesn't come to an end. The full wagons would come up, two at a time, clipped onto the rope. They went up on to the stage and it was my job to unclip them and let them roll around to the tumbler where they were tipped over. Then you'd go down a few steps to the bottom stage where the empties would be and you had to clip them onto the same rope and they would go down the tunnel. It was an endless rope, it kept on going all the time. But if you wanted it to stop, you could. There were always two bare wires that you could put a file across or anything and that would bell the engine room and that would stop it.

But other than that the endless haulages kept on going.

I left there after about a year, I think, and I went to Bonnie Dundee, Sunrise Colliery. That was back along the road to the main road from Blackheath. Blackheath was further in. I worked there for a good number of years, I think until about 1964. I did all sorts of things there because in those days it was all contract mining.

Can you explain contract mining?

Contract Mining - it was pick and shovel days with wagons (they might have called them skips). You were on a contract, there was you and your mate. You had to have two years experience at the face to become a faceman, and then you would have another fellow with you, that would be your mate, and you would work together.

You would have to drill the holes using a hand instrument, turning a handle to bore the hole to put the explosives in, light the fuse, blow the coal out, then shovel it into the wagon. Then you would have to wheel the wagon to what we called the lie where they'd come down with the rope and pick it up and take it to the surface.

You were paid by the tonnage, but you had to buy your own explosives. You'd walk up to the magazine each morning and get whatever you wanted. Later on they went onto electric dets [detonators] and electric cap lights. I went on that for a while in what they called the lamp room, on the surface, repairing and charging and looking after those lamps.

Track 02

Then I did horse wheeling there. When the empties came down - what they called a “rake”, 12 empties - it was gravity feed because it was down hill into what they called a “lie”. From there, because the miners were working further in, it was too far for them to wheel, so they had a horse. You would hook the horse on and take the wagons in by horse then hook on the full ones and the horse would bring them back to the lie on a different road. You’d hook them up together and the rake would come down with another lot of empties and take the full ones away, that’s how it worked out.

Those horses, you had to see them to believe them, they were absolutely marvelous. They had a few horses there at Bonnie, but the one I was driving mostly was called Fourex, and he was a pony. I’d pick him up and he’d be all ready when I got to work because there was a chap Henry Woods and he used to look after the horses and get them all ready. They had the stables on the surface because the horses didn’t stay underground. (Photo 1) He’d be ready and I’d go over and get him. I’d take a bunch of thistles with me out of the back yard and he’d love them. I’d just let him graze around on the surface until it was time to go underground, he never had any harness on, no reins, and if I wanted to lead him I used to put my hand under his chin and he’d follow me anywhere. When we’d get underground of course he still didn’t have any harness or bridle or anything on, and we just worked him, he was my mate. We worked there every day and he knew what to do, he knew where to go.

We used to split the rake. There were 12 empties that would come down but I used to only take six into the miners. When the miners had done six you would come back and take another six into the miners to make up the 12 to go to the surface. Because it was a down-hill run from where the miners were working to the lie, we had to use a braking system, otherwise the wagons would run over the horse. That was done by sprags. A sprag is a piece of metal with a handle on it and you would shove it in the spokes in the wheel of the wagon and that would stop the wheel from turning- it was like a brake. The only trouble is that it wasn’t a constant down-hill, it was up a little bit too, so you had to take the sprags out and put the sprags in and so forth as you were going down. I did that for quite a while too, and I enjoyed working with the horses, I thought it was great.

When the horses went out, I went over to Cornwall. Cornwall was owned by the same company, I think it was Binnys that had it at the time. When I started at Bonnie Dundee, Archy Dobie owned it and then it went over to Binnys, they developed the mine further over and called it Edward S Cornwall. By that time it was owned by the City Electric Light Company, that was before whatever they call it now - they have changed the name so many times. Edward S Cornwall was one of the directors so they named the mine after him.

I worked there and by that time, we were on scraper



Photo 1: “They had stables on the surface, the horses didn’t stay underground....”

loaders and pans. When you used the scraper loaders you had to pin a rope to the face after you’d blown the coal down. You’d have a sort of winch with ropes and it would pull a bucket up to the face then you’d pull it back up again and it would scoop the coal up in the bucket and it would be tipped onto pans. Pans were about 5 foot in length and they had scraper chains which would scrape the coal along onto a belt and go to the surface.

Then they went from that to what they called “flight loading” but there wasn’t a lot of that done. Flight loading was done by using an AB cutter which was a cutting machine. You’d go in and cut the face. It had a big jib on the front about 9 foot long with a chain going around with picks in it. You’d set it up and you’d cut the face right round and then you’d fire the face and blow it all down. Then you’d take some of the picks off of the chain and you’d put on what they called “flights” which were flat pieces of metal about 6 inches by 6 inches and you’d wave that jib into the coal and wipe the coal onto the pans which were the same pans again, then take them to the surface and that’s what they call flight loading.

Later on they bought in a “conventional unit” which did away with the pans. You still used the cutting machine but only for cutting the face. The coal would then be blown down and then a loading machine would come in and it would be followed by a shuttle car. The loader would load the coal into the shuttle car and the shuttle car would take it to the belt end, the boot end they call it, and tip the coal onto the belt and it would go to the surface.

The shuttle car would hold about 7 or 8 tonnes and they were all electric on rubber-tyred wheels. They had a cable that would roll on and roll off as you’re going in and coming out, you never ever turned them around. They had two seats on them and a steering wheel in the middle. If you were going one way, then you would be sitting that way and if you were going the other way you would just sit in the other seat and go the other way - but you had to turn the steering wheel a different way. When you think about it, when you’re sitting in your car driving, if you want to go left you turn your steering wheel to the left. But if you turn yourself right round and sit at the wheel it’s the other way- if you want to go left you have to turn it to the right but that seemed to come natural. It was a bit

of a worry to me when they first bought the machines in, I thought how am I going to remember this, but it worked out pretty well, you get sort of used to it. That's what they called a conventional unit.

Then from there it went to the Miners which did away with the loader and the cutter but they kept the shuttle car. A Miner goes in and cuts the face so there are no explosives. It just cuts it all down and as it is cutting, the coal drops down onto an apron. The gathering arms gather the coal up onto the same thing, like a flight loader. It went right back up and into the car that's up the back of the Miner.

It went from timber to steel rails across the roof and bolts, we never had that when I first started in the mine - it was all timber for supporting the roof.

Track 03

There was quite a change from when you started.

There was a big change from when we started, and there were lots of problems too we had a lot of strikes and things. I can remember we had an underground strike. I think it actually stemmed from Edward S Cornwall mine but because we were all in the same branch, Sunrise and Edward S Cornwall were all the one branch at that time, it affected us too because I was working at Sunrise at that time. It was all to do with the company putting in a crushing plant for crushing the coal when it comes to the surface. They did something wrong because it would crush the coal down to what they wanted but it wouldn't take the big lumps out. They wanted us to break all these lumps up into small pieces and that was taking up time and remember, we're on a contract.

We used to use those lumps because the skips were only a certain size, I think they were about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton or something, the skips we had at that time; before that they were only $\frac{1}{2}$ ton. Sometimes you would have to wait for your empties to come down. That held you up and when you fired the coal down and when you were shoveling the coal in, you'd push any lumps to one side. When you filled the skip almost to the top you could pack all these lumps around the edge and then fill it up more. By doing that you've got more tonnage and that's what you were paid on. They wanted us to break them all up and we weren't real happy about that. We told them it was their own fault because they put the wrong machine in. There was a big strike about it and we were off work for a few weeks and then when we went back to work we stayed underground for a week.

What was that like?

Well that was interesting, sanitation wasn't real crash hot, you just disappeared somewhere. You'd make up a bed with a bag a few nails and a bit of timber. The management didn't help us much- they stopped the haulage from running so we couldn't get anything down to eat, we had to wheel it down ourselves. They wouldn't

charge the lamps so we had no light. We smuggled down a car battery just on the quiet and we dug a hole in the floor which was coal and we buried the car battery down in there so if anyone came down they wouldn't know it was there. You weren't supposed to have that down there but that gave us a bit of light. I can always remember one of the fellows there was Norm Jagger, he was a member of the Salvation Army and he was a band master. One of the days that we were down there was a Sunday, so he conducted a religious service there for us. Now that's something you don't always see.

We were pleased to get out, we were there for a week before it was all settled down. Bluey Miller was the leader of the union at the time. Digger Murphy eventually became the president of the union after Bluey Miller left but at that time he was a check inspector, because we had our own check inspectors in the union. He came down a few times. He would ask us how we were going and this and that. We also had a Women's Auxiliary who were cooking meals for us, we were living like kings but the only trouble is the conditions weren't too good, the accommodation wasn't crash hot. Two or three of us would take it in turns to wheel the empties up the incline to the surface, because we were only down so far. We'd get all the hot meals from the ladies auxiliary and put them all in the wagon and take them down and then take the empties back up again for breakfast.

Do you remember if you won out in that occasion?

Well we did sort of, we won that part of it. There were a few other little things that we attached to it but I just can't remember what they were about now, but we did win out on that. They ended up having to put in a another crusher because it wasn't necessary to break the lumps up. I don't know how long they thought we were going to break lumps anyway. They had to eventually put proper machinery in that was just ridiculous.

In general what was your relationship with mine management?

Not good, not in those days were talking the 50s, personally, probably alright, but when it came to conditions and problems of course the management didn't own the mine, they were only running the mine. It went over to the owners of the mine and I suppose they could have persuaded them a little bit I don't know but the relationship in those days wasn't real good. We had a lot of strikes, not real good at all. A lot of strikes were over trying to get better safety in the mines because it wasn't all real good.

Track 04

Then of course some people did silly things. I know there was one chap, when we were using the fuse before the electric dets [detonators] came round, of course our lamps were carbide, and there's not much safety in the mine when you've got a flame sitting on top of your head, so

THE BONNIE DUNDEE COAL COMPANY					
R. STEELE		PTY. LTD.	£	s	d.
73 Tons	5 cwt	3 qurs.	24	8	8
10 Days at	33/7	d.	16	15	10
Yardage	1 1/2 x 7/5	B3 x 3/4	1	2	10
Slab Allowance	6 x 2/9			16	6
Stone Allow.				6	7
Other Allowances	D.W.			6	-
Sick Pay					
Attendance Allow	1 x 60/6		3	-	6
Sundries					
GROSS WAGES			46	16	11
Explosives			6	15	2
DEDUCTIONS			40	1	9
Tax Instalments	£ 2 : 18 : 6				
Ambulance	£ : 3 : 4				
Pensions	£ : 12 : -				
Insurance	£ : 5 : -				
Goods	£ : : -				
Sundries	£ : : -				
			3	18	10
NET AMOUNT OF WAGES			36	2	1
F/E 19/3/55					

THE BONNIE DUNDEE COAL COMPANY					
R. STEELE		PTY. LTD.	£	s	d.
52 Tons	17 cwt	3 qurs.	17	12	8
8 Days at	33/7	d.	13	8	8
Yardage	B3 x 5/1	B3 x 3/4	1	6	3
Slab Allowance	4 x 2/9			12	4
Stone Allow.				3	11
Other Allowances					
Sick Pay					
Attendance Allow	8/10 x 60/6		2	8	5
Sundries	S. HOL. 2 x 60/6		6	1	-
GROSS WAGES			41	13	3
Explosives			5	14	9
DEDUCTIONS			35	18	6
Tax Instalments	£ 2 : 5 : -				
Ambulance	£ : 2 : 11				
Pensions	£ : 12 : -				
Insurance	£ : 5 : -				
Goods	£ : : -				
Sundries	£ : : -				
			3	4	11
NET AMOUNT OF WAGES			32	13	7
F/E 16/4/55					

Photo 2: Wages slips, Bonnie Dundee, showing deductions for purchase of explosives

we used the fuse in those days. We used to make up a shot then bore a hole in it with an electric borer which came in about 1949. You'd then put the gelly in [gelignite] - whatever amount you thought was required to blow the coal out without blowing it all over the place because you'd want the coal handy to fill it into the wagon. Then you'd put what they called a primer in, that was another piece of gelly with a det and the detonator was clamped on to the fuse. You'd put that in and then you'd stem it up with stemming.

When you bought your explosives, you'd buy a roll of fuse which would be so many feet and you'd just snip off each day what you needed for each shot. You'd light the shot, disappear out of the road and it would go off but by the end of the day this roll of fuse had got less and less and less and you got to a point where it was too short to use. I would never use the fuse like this because my father would never do it, so I didn't do it. They called this a flyer and what they did they would put the gelly in then they'd make up the primer, the det and the short piece of fuse, then they'd have to light that because it disappeared in the hole because it was too short so they'd have to light it before they'd stem it up and then they'd stem it up and then they'd run.

Well one bloke was a little bit slow and he was very lucky he didn't get his head blown off. It must have only been a small shot or something but his face got all peppered. He came to the surface and he was alright but his father was the manager of the mine at the time. He said "Do you think you could just keep it quiet dad?" "Keep it quiet!" he said "The whole mine knows all about it!" It had to be notified to the mines department but it was all fixed up.

That's what silly things you can do but we wouldn't do

it. What we used to do in those days, I remember, we used to have a cracker night. We would bring those short pieces home, anything from 2 to 3 feet depending on the length of the hole. So over a period of 12 months you'd have quite a few pieces and you could unroll them and the core in the middle was like a string which would have gunpowder on it, and that's what used to burn slow. We'd pull all that off and put it into a tin and make crackers out of that. We would get a block of wood and bore a hole in it and then put that in and use a bit of fuse. We would put it in the fowl pen out of the road and they used to go off with a fair bang. This wasn't a good idea either but that's what we did that's how we used it up, seems a bit better than charging a hole up while the fuse is still lit, it's a bit crazy.

It was interesting that there was no specialisation. You did everything from the gelignite, mining, loading it all.



Photo 3: The Steele family, Cracker Night

Yes we had to, because I had two years experience I was classed as a faceman and I was then qualified to use explosives.

Were you trained in that?

No, it used to be if your father worked in the mine, then you got a job in the mine. You would work with him as mates as we called ourselves. I would fill and wheel and my father would work the face, bore the holes and blow it out. Then of course he would help me fill too.

You had to use timber to support the roof but you didn't have to buy that. The only things you had to buy was all your explosives and your tools. They consisted of picks, shovel, stemmer stick which was like a long wooden broom handle for charging the shots and basically that was about all you had to buy. The company had to supply the rails, the timber, the wagons and they also had to supply a "roadman". He was employed by the company and he would come in and put rails on because as the coal is going out, you are advancing further in. Your wagon gets too far away to shovel the coal in so you needed the roadman to be putting rails on, and the company would supply this.

We all had a tally number - I think mine was 16 - and you would go up to the magazine in the morning and whatever you wanted regarding explosives, that would put down to you as number 16. Then you'd go to work and work the day and the next day you'd do the same. It was fortnightly pays there and when you got your pay packet it would be all on there how much gel you bought how many dets were all booked to 16. But 16 was not only me it was also the fellow with me - we worked together and everything was split in halves.

We would put slabs up, which was a piece of timber about 6 foot long, 2 inches thick, 6 inches wide by 4 inches wide. When I first started it was all split timber which was pretty splintery but then later on, they brought in that you had to have sawn timber. It would go across your roadway with a prop on each end so you had to do that as you worked, but you didn't have to buy that timber - the company supplied it. It would be stored underground in the lie, with the empties and the full ones.

When your mate wheeled the full one out to get another empty, he would bring a prop in when he came back. They were in different lengths about 3 inches difference so if it didn't fit you had to dig down with the pick in the floor and bury it. If you were only putting up a single prop you could use caps which were pieces of timber that were sawn. They were anything from about ½ inch to an inch thick, 3 inches to 6 inches wide and a foot long just to sit over the top of the prop when it went up against the roof.

Track 05

How big were the tunnels you were working in? How wide, how high?

I know my father worked in 22 inches. The wooden wagons were cut down where you put your hands to

wheel to keep your fingers down so you didn't touch the roof. You were crawling around on your knees most of the time so you would have pads on your knees. I never worked that. What we called the 4 foot seam. It was 4 foot because they were only counting below, there was two bands to recognise the 4 foot seam. You would see there would be two bands of stone and they were about an inch or so thick and then there would be a band of coal about the same and that was the 4 foot seam. In the days of the Depression when they worked the 4 foot seam they would only work from those bands down to the floor which was about 4 foot and up above that was the roof. In my day they used to take that so I suppose the lowest I ever worked in was about 5 foot in height. Especially at Bonnie's Sunrise mine they worked three seams. They worked the 4 foot, the Bergin seam and top coal. Top coal was always the one to get into because you were working something like 9 foot high and of course you'd use less explosives. You got more out of it because of the height and didn't have to advance as far.

Being on contract we worked a cavil and I think we had up to about 16 sets of two men working at one time. Each quarter, they'd have a meeting and they'd pick out scrutineers, it was their job to go around with the manager to each bord which was where the men were working and make sure you could make money out of this work. You would ask George if he was going to work with Joe for example and they would go down as a couple and then you'd have a cavil. Your bords would be numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, . So if it was bord number 6 that came out for Rudy Steele that's where you went for the next three months. You would have to put all your gear in a wagon and mark on it with chalk where it was to go and the rope riders would deliver it. When you would start on the Monday or whenever the cavil were starting all your tools would be there. You would work there for three months.

So you rotated so the one person didn't get the best seam all the time?

Only unless you were unlucky enough to draw it. If you drew a bad bord each time and you couldn't make big money out of it, you'd be starting to ask a few questions. But if you could get into top coal like everybody wanted to, you could make big money because you would use less explosives and it was higher.

Track 06

When things got more mechanized, did you specialise more then, you said when you started you were doing everything, explosions etc?

When they became mechanised, that was a funny thing because we'd never seen those machines underground before. There was only one cutter and the company picked who would operate it and they picked me. I could then pick someone else. By that time, we were on double shifts. We used to work afternoon shift, day shift, week about.

The flight loading machine was the cutter and then it

would load the coal onto the pans, so all you had in the crew would be two men on the machine and then there would be two men coming into do the timbering and basically that's about all you'd have.

Once you had cut the face, you would fire it and then load it out. You would have to keep going, because they might want to push another place a bit further forward to couple up for air and also you could go in there. That didn't go for very long, maybe 12 months. When they bought the conventional unit in, that was the pans gone. They had the cutter which only cut the face, they had the loader, and they had the shuttle car. You still had two men on the cutter, two men on the loader and you had a man for each shuttle car and there were two shuttle cars. They used to run one shuttle car in and while it was being loaded the other one was unloading.

The shuttle cars would go on a different road, they would run cables on and run cables off. We used to have a bit of trouble with the cables, not the car cables because they rolled on and rolled off, but the cutter and the loader cables, they didn't. So therefore you had a second man on it when you were fighting from one bord to another. If I was going from a bord here to a bord over there with the cutting machine, my mate would look after the cable and when I was in position he would hang that cable up as he came in so the shuttle car could go past without running over the cable, because we are talking about 400 volts. They were big cables too about 2 inches across. While you were cutting the face the loader could be somewhere else, so you would have to find out who was coming out first, otherwise you are going to have one cable over the other. If the one that's underneath comes out first how is he going to come past your cable. So we would work out who would come out first and run over the cable.

To run over the cable you would have to put down a couple of those slabs because the loader and the cutter were on steel tracks. Then it would be in the correct position for the machines to come out. It was funny one morning we were on day shift, we came to work and went underground and here was the two cables all twisted up in one section it was a mess. The only way to untwist them was to pull them out of the electrical box and unwind them all and then plug them back in again. That's why we run over the cables the way we did. Sometimes the loader crew would have to run over my cable or I would have to run over theirs depending on who's coming back first. We were coming back from two different locations, the cutter would be in one bord and the loader would be in another, they were never together, there was no room for them anyway. When the miner came down they had big cables about 3 inches across and they were very heavy - they might stay in the same place the whole shift and not go away from there.

All that was coming in and going out would be the shuttle cars. They would come in and get loaded and go out and get unloaded and another one would come in from a different direction you just had to watch one another's cables. You never crossed over because you came from

different directions. At one end you would end up at the Miner and at the other end you would end up at the boot end and tip your coal on the belt. Because we came different directions we didn't have any problems that way.

Track 07

Can you take me through a typical day in the mine? What shifts you did, what you did when you arrived?

When I finished at Cornwall, I went to New Hope and I was there until I retired, it was fully mechanised there. You would park your car, hop out and go into the bathroom which was very big. The bathroom had three sections. You would come into the clean end because you would go in with clean clothes when you go to work, you would change and you had your own basket which would pull up to the roof, by that time you didn't have any tally number but you did have a lamp number, a self-rescue number, basically you were a number, and on your basket in the bathroom was your number. You would peel off and put your gear in the basket and hang it up. They also had big heater blowers in there for drying any wet clothes you had.

Then you would walk across from the shower room to the dirty room - it was all in one big building. This is where you pick up your dirty clothes from the day before, if you had washed them under the shower they would be hung up there and they would be dry and hard as a board. You would have your boots there, your clothes and your cap. Then you would go out from there where you would pick up your light which is on a charger and there was a bloke looking after all that. You would get your light and put on your self rescue-unit which would go on your belt too. Then you would toddle off outside and wait until they started work.

They had personnel carriers which were diesel vehicles. There were quite a few tunnels out there, and they were all over the place, so if you were working in tunnel 7 then you would hop on that personnel carrier that would take you down to No 7. If you were on number 6 it was a bit different. It was closer to the bathrooms and you went down by rope on a haulage. It was like sitting on a wagon on a train with seats and that would take you down to the bottom of the mine which was fairly steep, that was why they had a haulage system. When you got down to the bottom it leveled off and there was a ramp there and when you got out, there would be a personnel car there and you would take that into wherever you were working.

When they bought supplies down, they had scout cars which were a diesel vehicle that would bring all the supplies down. I was on that for a while, it wasn't a bad job. You would come to the surface to the scout car and check the fuel and oil. The car had a big tank at the back which held 200 gallons of hydraulic oil which was to pump into the miner when you got down there. You would load up whatever they wanted - timber, bolts, plates or

spare parts, you would have to check with the electricians workshop or the mechanical workshop to see if any parts were to go down to Number 4, for example same with the fitters if they had something to go down you would have to load it up, put bolts on, bags of stone dust (by this time they were dusting underground, it was like limestone) whatever would be needed for No 4 Miner. You might have to take some water down for the urn to make a cup of tea. You would put your car on a steel flat top and the wheels on the car would fall into the recess and then you would chain it on and the same wagon the men went down on it would be hooked on the other end, and they would lower it down.

When you got down the bottom it would hit up against the ramp and you would drive the car off there and then drive to Number 4 Miner for example. There were quite a few Miners in that area. You would take all the supplies in. You would have to wait back away from the shuttle cars when you got there and check with them because you can't hold them up because they were on a bonus and they don't want to be held up. You would have to wait until they said they were ready to do the timbering and when they did some timbering they would stop cutting the coal until they put bolts up or they were using steel straps by that time and you would wait until they told you to come down, and the two shuttle cars are out of your way, you would drive down the road and off load all of this stuff.

You would pull a hose that was rolled up on the scout car which you would put into the tank of the Miner and you would kick off a pump and that was worked by the gear box in the scout car. That would pump the oil from the scout car out of the 200 gallon tank into the Miner tank to fill it up with hydraulic oil. All the big machines leaked and they had about 1000 hoses on them so they would want oil regularly. When you have done that you would back off and then you would go back to that surface, you would go back to that flat top. By this time you would be in contact with them by phone to say you were going to be there and they might bring down another car, we had two scout cars working, one would be on the surface with another crew, there were two on the cars. Then you would go to the surface and you would have a bit of time on the surface getting another load or whatever you had to do, that wasn't a bad job that one.

Track 08

Did the diesel cars put fumes into the mine?

Oh yeah, they had a scrubber tank. That consisted of the exhaust going into a tank of water before it went out into the atmosphere. We had to test that, we had a bulb and we had three packets of glass tubes. One of them was to test for nitrous gases, one was CO₂ and then there was another one you had to test but I can't remember what it was. To test it, you would take a glass tube out of the packet. It was sealed on both ends so to test it - up the glass tube there was numbers, you would break the little place on the bulb to break off the ends of the tube and you would

insert the tube into this bulb and while the motor was running you had to go over so far from the exhaust and you had to pump this so many times and you would get a reading - it would change the colour of the crystals in the tube and you would see a reading. Then you would write that down and you would have to do that to the others to check all this and it had to be done underground. Then it had to be put into a book when you got to the surface, because each Scout Car had a book and you would put the readings down. If those reading weren't right, it would have to go to the mechanical workshop and they would have to do something about it.

It was our job to clean the scrubber tanks which consisted of a header tank which would hold something like 20 gallons or more and that would gravity feed down into another tank down near the motor. In that tank there was a float and a valve so that as the water was used because of the heat with the exhaust going through it, the float would drop and then the water would come down by gravity feed from the top tank down to it to fill it up and that's how it worked. That exhaust went through the water and that's how they were suppose to make it safe, or smell better, whether it worked or not I don't know.

Another thing you had to do was fill your tank up when you went to the surface to get parts or whatever the Miner required. You'd check the fuel because there was a big tank there for fuel, you would check your radiator and top it up if it was necessary, and you would have to top up your header tank for the scrubber tank and make sure that was full.

On the car they had a device - the first starter motor they had was called an impulse starter motor, it just looked like a normal starter motor. There were a little 4-cylinder Perkins diesel engine - but inside it had a whole series of plates that were buckled like a cone and you had to put a crank handle in and you had to wind it before you could start it. What it did when you were winding it up, it would take those plates from a cone shape to a straight flat shape and then there was a trigger and you would set another device on there which was a safety cut off if something went wrong with the motor somewhere down the track. You would pull that back and then you would hit this button and that would let the starter motor turn the motor over by springing the flat plates back to their normal position and that's how it worked. If it didn't start, well bad luck Charlie, you would have to wind it up again. They used them for quite a while, they weren't too bad.

Later on they bought in air starts and they had a big air tank built into the Scout Car and they had a compressor on the motor which used to pump air into it, blow a valve off like all the air start stuff. You could wind them so far too but eventually you would run out of air, they used to have a bit of trouble with that. They put on an auxiliary air, it was like one of those oxy cylinders that they had, but it had air in it and they'd bolt that on and if you ran out of air from your normal tank you could turn a valve and fill it with air from that, that was a bit of a safety thing.

They had a device on the motor like I said that would cut it off and it had a little flag on there. One of them was a drop in oil pressure and the other was over heating. If you had the motor running and you came back and it had shut itself off, that little flag would indicate why it had shut itself off - whether it was a drop in oil pressure in the motor, or whether the motor was overheating. A bit of a safety feature.

We also had another machine there, which was very handy - this was at New Hope, and they called it a Domino. It was a machine that was made for underground and had the scrubber tanks and diesel engines and had a bucket on the front like a scoop. You could go in and pick up stuff. I drove that quite a bit. They used to like to see you come into the bord where they were working, because what used to happen in lots of cases - when the shuttle car was at the boot end putting the coal into the boot, some would drag back underneath and it would build up underneath. The shuttle car had a bad habit of dragging underneath and sitting on it and the wheels wouldn't turn so they liked to see you coming with the domino because you could scoop it up and tip it into the boot end.

But we used that for all sorts of things, especially when number 6 tunnel had a heating problem and they had to seal it off which meant that they had to block off all the entrances to starve it from any oxygen and that was sealed off for quite a few months. They had probes in there to tell them what was down there, reading on monitors on the surface. When they decided they were going to open it up, they opened it up and put the fan on slow speed. Then they wanted a couple of blokes to go down. I went down, another fellow and a deputy and that's all that went down. We only got so far down and found a big fall, a series of many falls. It took us about two months to clean the fall up using these machines. We could also put on a hydraulic motor to bore a hole up in the roof to put a roof bulb in off this machine. There was no power down there at this stage, the only power was that Domino and we just used that for everything.

We got to a point where we got some machines out, I think we got a Miner and a shuttle car out, by this time we were working for Lloyds of London because all these machines were under insurance with Lloyds of London and apparently they must have said "Get the machines out", so they were paying us to do this and when we found out about that we thought well this is going to be a little bit extra, we got extra out of them, I can't remember what it was now but we got more than the award to do the job.

It did get to a point where water was starting to beat us, we were putting in pumps and putting in pipes and walking over the tops of falls with pipes on the shoulder and pumping water out. They got to a point where Lloyds of London paid them out. They still worked the mine, they went down in a different direction and we never saw those machines again they're still there. They went down a different direction and that particular tunnel got under production again.

Track 09

There was a funny thing that happened there once. When you come on to the mine site, the first thing you come to would be where they load the trucks to take the coal to the power station and then there was the big washing plant, then there was a big haulage. To go to 6 tunnel, the rails were on the surface for about 100 yards before it went into the tunnel. I got there one day, it was afternoon shift, I met up with my mate - that was the time we were are only working the two of us getting it ready. He said to me "Oh they found the car down the tunnel this morning". I said "What do you mean a car?" - I thought he meant a scout car or a shuttle car or something, "No" he said, "a proper car! a Falcon". I said "Yeah bullshit, how did that happen?" "Well, must have been funny I tell you. He said the two deputies had come on to make a pre-shift inspection, they were using two deputies at that time in that particular tunnel. They were walking down probably chatting away about anything, next thing they saw all these lights down the tunnel further, they thought "What the devil's going on down there", because there shouldn't be anybody there. Anyway eventually they got a bit closer and they saw this white figure step out, they thought "Oh were dead we've gone to heaven".

What it turned out, there was a car there, there was a Falcon there about a hundred yards down the tunnel and the lights they saw was reflection from their lights on the glass in the car. And then the figure that stepped out was a bloke all dressed in his bowling whites. He stepped out and they said to him "What are you doing down there? Do you know where you are?" "Yeah" he said "I think I'm in a tunnel or something." "How did you get down here?" Because he had to drive all the way over these rails and of course in the middle of the rails they have what they call Tommy Dods, they're a roller that the rope runs on, it would have done damage to his car for sure, He said "Oh I was following my mate" They said "Oh no don't tell me there is another car further down." So one of them went down further to see where this other car was, but there wasn't another car.

Apparently he was lost and coming home from somewhere and I don't know how he got there it was out of the way of everything but he thought he was following this other fellow that must have turned somewhere else and he didn't see.

They had to get in touch with the mines department and they had to get in touch with the surface, they had to get the haulage down, they had to hook it onto the car and drag the car back out, disconnect the battery in the car because it was an open battery and that's not allowed underground, and disconnect that to drag this car all the way out.

That story appeared later on I think it was in the Pix - remember the Pix or one of those sorts of publications. I wished I had been there - that would have been funny.

Track 10

Were there any times when you were worried about safety down there or just feeling worried for your own safety?

The only time you get a bit concerned is when they are extracting pillars. But for the average days work, it was just like if you were working in a shop and you walked into the shop - it didn't affect me in any way that way. But [it could be a concern] when we were working pillars, we worked pillars on contract.

They worked what they called a pillar and bord system, which meant as they went in they left these big blocks of coal, and they would go in and they would crisscross and you would end up with this big block of coal, they'd go in further and go this way and that way. That way they had to have an air return way, a way of going into the mine, later on they had to have a belt road and they had to have a return road and they had to have a supply road so there was all these different ways going in, but they always linked up with one another and left this big block of coal and that was the pillar.

Well they'd go in so far and there could be numerous reasons why, they might have come across a fault or something which meant the coal disappeared and was way down there or way up there or something like that, so they decided they would pull back, or they might have been at the end of their lease or something like that, it could be any sort of reason, maybe the haulage was too long to drag the coal. But then they would get to a point where they were going to pull back that they'd take these pillars, when you start taking the pillars out, you take the main support of the mine away and of course it falls in and that can become a worry, specially when they brought the machinery in.

When they had the pick and shovel days, the old contract days, we did that too and of course there's no noise, the only noise you would have is when a shot went off and then it would be quiet and you could hear people taking to you and you knew where you were, it wasn't too bad. The only trouble was there was this one bloke and he wasn't real good on explosives and you would end up with all these props up and it looked like a forest with all these trees. He would fire a shot and blow them all out and walk back and say "Once it was a forest, now it's a plain".

But anyway, with the machinery when you started pulling pillars out, you got a lot of noise with your machinery and that can become a bit of a worry and you would get to read it.

We had one fellow there he was an electrician he was one of these phantoms. You know the Phantom comics? In the Phantom comics he has a safety sign, it's a round red ring with a bit of a plus in the middle of it or something. When it was going to fall you would know and you could pull right back and wait and it's cracking and carrying on and he would put a sign on the prop, "That's as far as it will come mate", and he was right every time, as far as it would come that Phantom sign must have done the job.

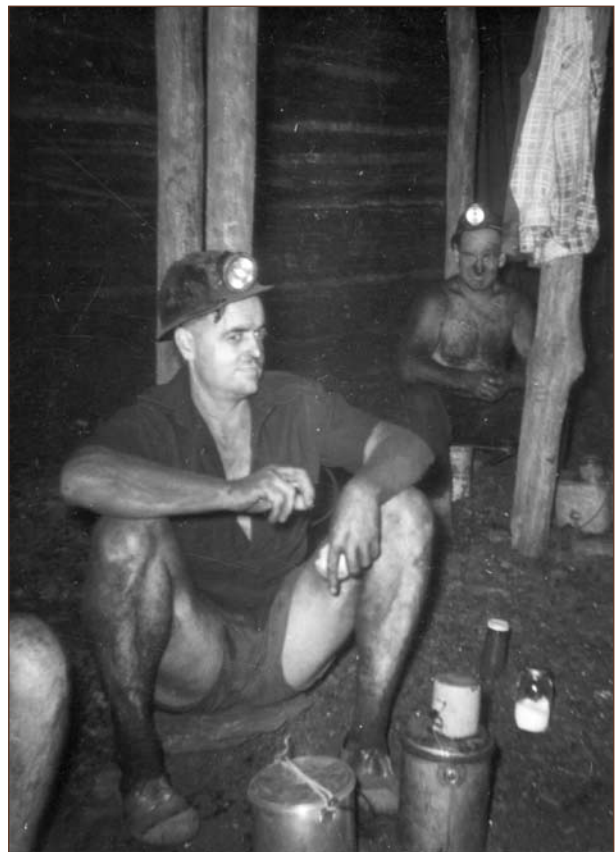


Photo 4: "We would have a billy with our lunch in it".

That's the only time that concerned me greatly was the pillars. Of course when it falls, a big area of about the size of this yard could fall in one hit, now that pushes a lot of air and it can only go one way - it can't go that way because there is no way out - it comes back to where you are and if you are too close it will blow you off your feet, it's a bit of a worry but I survived anyway.

Track 11

Once you were down for the day you stayed down for the whole day, you didn't come up for lunch?

No we would have a billy with our lunch in it. (Photo 4) I'd have all sorts of things, they used to ask me "What have you got today?" because Audrey would get a hock and cook the hock and stick it in the billy or there might be a big container with pineapple or something in it. We used to have tea down there, we had an urn and you'd turn the urn on and make a big billy of tea for us. But when it came to the machine mining, the machinery didn't stop, it would only be so many of you that would go out at one time and have something to eat. Which was a little bit short staffed but that's how it would work, if I went out so there might be four of us go out if we went out the first today, we'd go out the second tomorrow, and work it that way. But no, we never went up to the surface to eat, it was too far, not even contract, it would take too much time.

And the New Hope mine, where was that, the one you said you were working on?

Out behind Swanbank, it was a big mine, if you went out there and went to the power station, before you got to the power station you'd go past Box Flat and so you continue on and go through the power station and go round the lake and instead of going right round the other side of the lake to the left, you'd continue straight, and then turn to the right, and it was up on the hill up there. It was a pretty big mine – we supplied coal there to the power station for a long time, with Box Flat. Quite a few working there.

I remember when Box Flat went up too, because I wasn't working at Box Flat, I was still working at New Hope, but we'd had an accident and a fellow was killed at New Hope and the funeral was this particular day. And while I was at the funeral the manager came over to me and, because at that time I was on supplies, he asked me if I'd go out to the mine, at 10 o'clock that night, and go to the workshop and pick up a certain part for a Miner and take it down and put it on the tail of the Miner for the dog watch - and the dog watch was a maintenance shift - so that when they came to go on shift, the part would be there. So I said 'Oh yeah' and of course, I had to see my mate, the bloke who was with me, so we did that, and he said 'That's all that you've got to do, and you'll get a full days pay for that,' that was fair enough. So we went out at that time, whatever time it was about 10 o'clock I think and picked up the part, of course there was others there at the time and went underground because we had to rely on the haulage to take the scout car down on the flat top. And then we drove down to the mine, put the part on the Miner, and come back, went to surface, had a bit of a shower, we weren't too dirty.

Then I was coming back through Box Flat, and I thought to myself, 'Gee whiz there's a lot of activity here.' Usually Box Flat didn't have a dog watch, they didn't work a dog watch and it was usually pretty quiet at that time. But there were lights everywhere, people around, so I thought 'Oh I don't know what's going on here,' so I came home, and went to bed. I hadn't been in bed long before she went 'vroomvroom vroom' and Box Flat blew up. So if I had been coming through a bit earlier, it probably wouldn't have been very good, because some of those that were killed were on the surface. You just never know. But we didn't have anything like that while I was working, not at New Hope anyway. We had a few blokes who were killed there while I was there, but that was happening in the mining industry, it's reasonably dangerous I suppose when you get underground, you know, anything can happen.

Track 12

(talking about some old pictures)

Photo 5: Well that's of course, me and Fourex, and that's Fourex there, and that's the stalls, that's on the surface, and that's where I used to go and pick him up. It does show a bridle on there, that was on part of the dress of



"Photo 5: That's me and Fourex."

the horse, but I used to take that off because it wasn't necessary. A lot of the others, there's probably one in here of another horse called Dick, you had to have a bridle on him, but you didn't need one on Fourex. A hand under the chin was all that you needed for him, the only thing is, I tried to take him underground that way, he wasn't worried about going underground, none of them were, but he was a bit slow, he wasn't in a hurry to go underground. I wanted to get down there so I used to have to walk behind him and keep pushing him along. It didn't worry him, you could do anything with him.

I'll tell you a funny story about that horse, I was working in there one day with the horse. Of course one of the rules was, if there was a horse who was not well, if there's something wrong with the horse, then it can't go underground and if something happens to it while it's working, then it's got to come to the surface because there are other horses there.

Well, this one here, one day he was all ready to go, right inside, but the last man who brought the full wagon down bumped the others a bit much, and it got him going, and of course he took off, because he was on the front and he had to. So I thought 'Oh boy this is great' and I'm chasing behind him. They can see in the dark you know, these horses, and he followed the road all the way down, and it got to a point where the road went straight ahead where the full wagons go, but over to the left there was just a set of points there that went down, that was the empty road, so when he got to there, he thought 'Well I'm not going in front of these things any more' and so he dived down

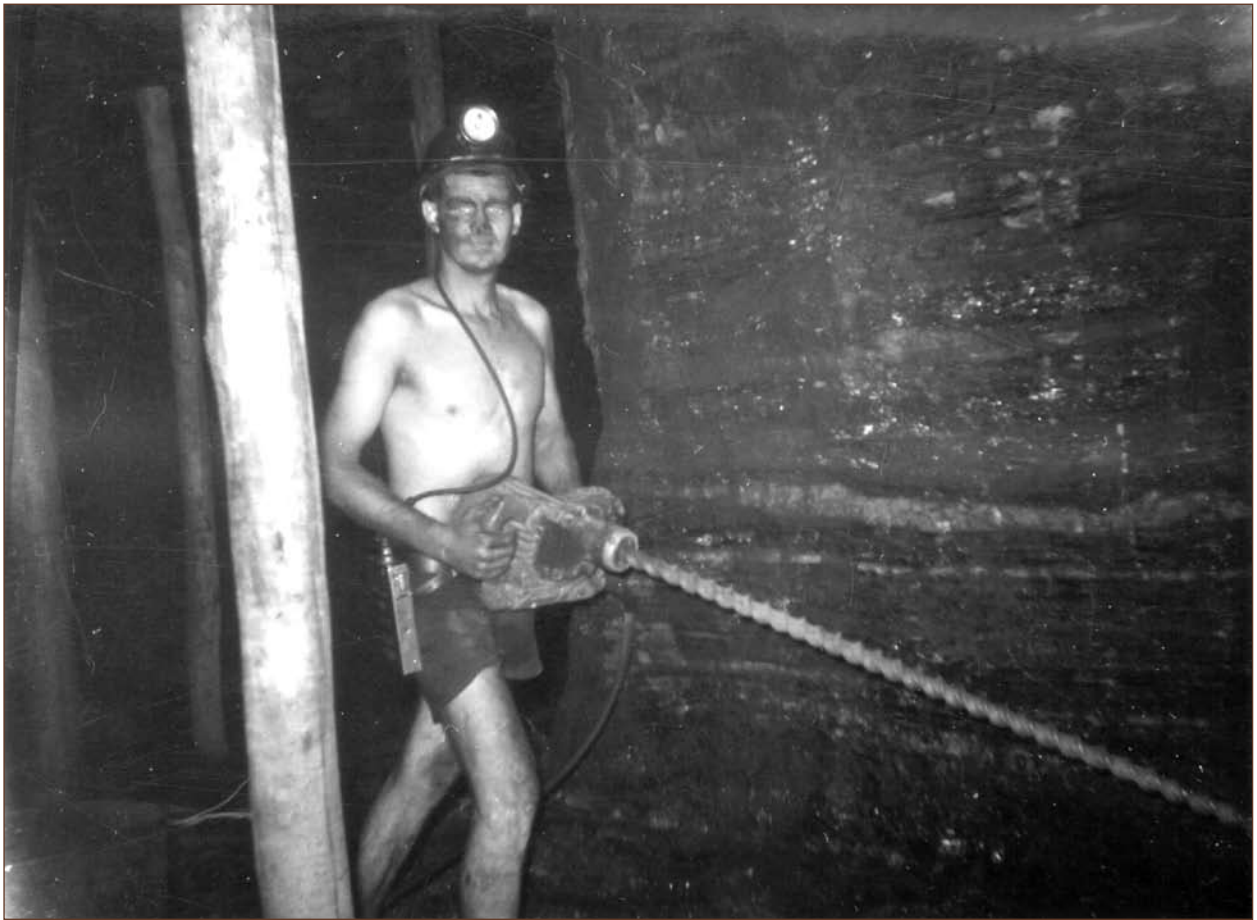


Photo 6: "This is top coal section, which is very tall, as you can see this fellow's standing straight up, and he's using the electric borer."

there, and when he did that - the wagons weren't traveling at a terrific speed or anything - the wagons went straight ahead, because I'd changed the points when I'd left there to go straight ahead, and it pulled him back, which pulled the wagons up, and when I got to him, he was standing there in the empty road, and the wagons were in the full road with the chain tight, but he had his foot caught in the part of the point they call the frog, it's the v-section of the points, and when you have the points set together to go this way or that way you'll run one way on that v-point.

Well, he'd pulled his hoof into that v, and of course he couldn't pull it out. So I had to fix him up and push the wagons back or whatever, and then he started to limp. I thought 'Oh yeah, fair enough' so I thought that I had better take him to the surface because I can't work him when he's limping. So anyway, I got in touch with the surface, we had a phone there to make sure there was no rake coming down 'Yeah ok we'll wait till you come up' so I walked him to the surface and went to the stalls there, and I grabbed another horse, probably Nugget - he was about his size - dressed him up, and took him down.

I started work again, and it wasn't long after that Archie Dobie came down, it was all during the time Archie Dobie owned the mine, this is Bonnie of course, Sunrise, and he used to come down occasionally and asked 'Oh, what happened to Fourex?' and I told him what had happened

and he said 'Yeah, he's running around like a two year-old up there' and I said 'Yeah right, he's working tomorrow then', so Fourex had bunged it on a bit I think. So that was Fourex, absolutely amazing fellow.

Photo 6: Now this is top coal section - these fellows are working top coal. The top coal section is very tall, as you can see, this fellow's standing straight up, and he's using the electric borer. And this drill on here was 9 feet. The ones we used to use before the electric borer came in were 5 feet in a series of 3 drills. You'd use one, and then you'd take that out and put another one in, but this is the electric borer, which was pretty good.

Photo 7 That's the skip. That shows the wooden skip, we eventually got steel skips, but that's a bigger skip than what we used to have in the early days of contract. They were only a half tonne, these were about $\frac{3}{4}$ tonne, and you see how the coal's heaped up there, well, if you had big lumps, you'd pack them along there, all the way around, and you could put more in, like I said before. That's a prop, holding the roof, and of course in top coal, it was very good roof too, excellent roof. So you had that, plus the height, so everyone wanted to cavil into top coal.

Which mine was that?

Ah, this is Sunrise, Sunrise Mine, where they worked the three seams.

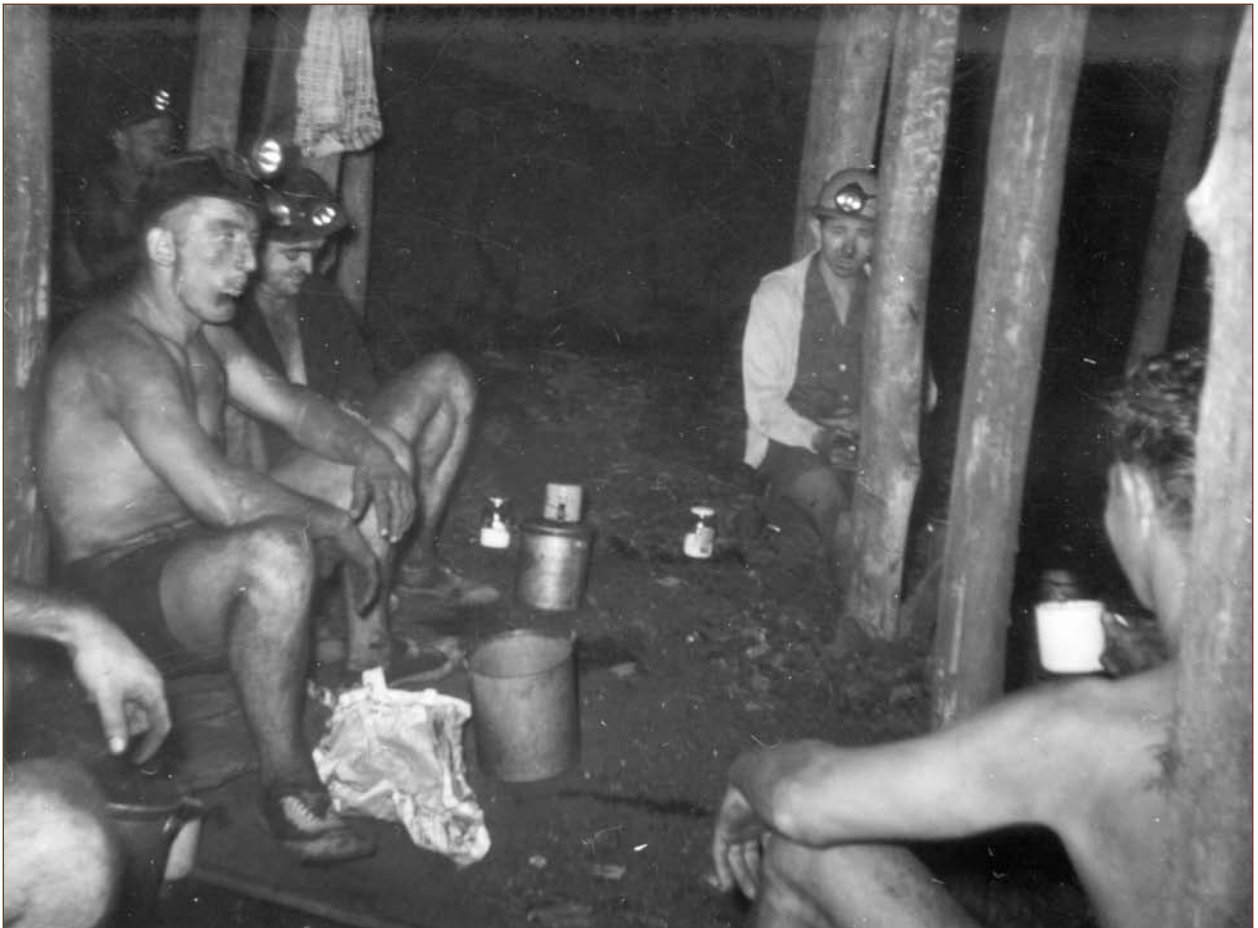


Photo 8: “.. this is crib time we’re sitting down eating.”

And that’s me there, and that’s my mate, that’s Johnny Healing, he lives up at the North Coast somewhere now, haven’t seen him in years, but I don’t know about these fellows. I know who they are, but I don’t know where they are,

Photo 8: And this is crib time, this is how we used to eat, we’re sitting down eating. This is still at Sunrise, and these two worked together. I’m not there, unless I’m here somewhere, and this is the only Chinese fellow we ever saw in the mine and he was a good lad too, a good worker. So that’s what you did. You’d probably sit on a brick or something, you know, used to use these big bricks to put the stoppings up, to seal up an area from behind in there, or whatever you’d happen to have, anything that would make up a bed or a chair or something, others would have a few papers or a few rags to sit on. It was pretty basic, pretty rough. It was rough and tough them days, you know.

Did you have a very long lunch break or did you just keep going?

Oh well, if you’re on a contract you don’t. You could sit down all day and the company wouldn’t care because they’re only paying for the coal you put across the top.

Of course, this is the days of the electric light too, so they got the electric light, no carbide lighters there. I’ve got the old lights up the back, I’ve got an old tallow-

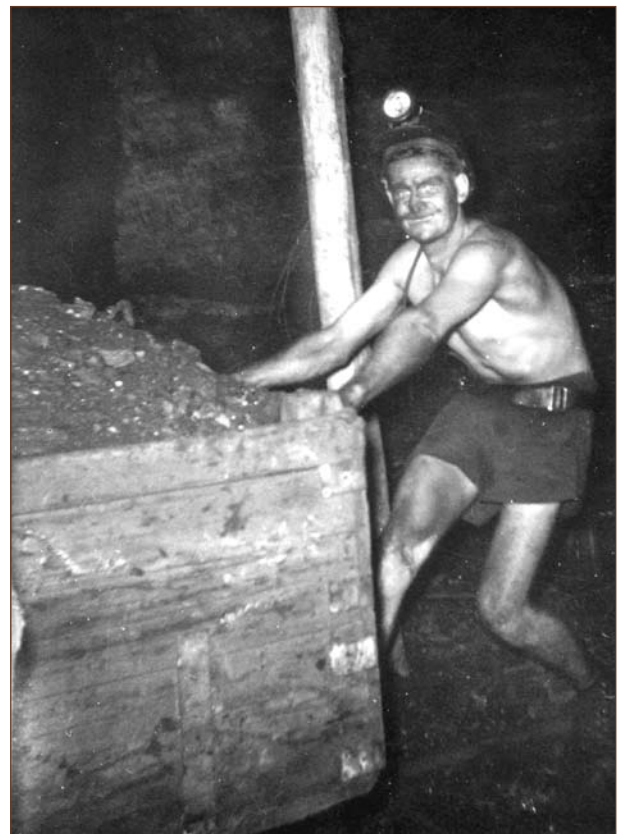


Photo 7: “That shows the wooden skip, these were about ¾ tonne.”



Photo 9: Crib time underground,

lamp up there. That was a forerunner to these, to the carbide, because you had the tallow-lamp, then you had the carbide, and then they came up with the electric lamp, which was a battery on your belt.

But when you started it was carbide, you didn't have tallow did you?

Yeah I didn't have tallow, tallow was before my time, it was all carbide. You had to buy your lamp, the carbide light, and then you had to buy the carbide, you could buy that from any store, the store that was around the corner or anywhere, you'd buy it so much a pound. The trick was of course, to be able to change it over in the dark, because when the carbide ran out, the light went off and so you had to be near your carbide and a bit of water, and do it in the dark so that you could get your light going again. There was many a time where I'd get caught, and I had to follow the rails out – because you knew where you were, and you knew where your carbide was and you'd follow the rail, because it's pitch black. Once your light goes out, there's nothing there. It's not quite like today, all lit up, but anyway, you'd follow the rail. Trip over a Tommy Dod you know, and follow the rail until you got to a set of points 'oh yeah, yeah, that's where I've got to go now, up there' and gradually get there, get your little box – we used to have our carbide in a Horlicks bottle. They used to have Horlicks in bottles so big and we'd



Photo 10: Sunrise Mine: Rudy Steele at rear.



Photo 11: "That's Terry Bullock, the one in the middle is Ray Cobbin ..and this is John Healing, he was my mate, he wheeled with me."

you strapped them on, but sometimes they didn't. Then you were left in the dark with those ones too, but they had an extra bulb in there, which was pretty weak, and you'd probably get enough light to get yourself from somewhere. But you'd have to get on the phone and ring them up and say bring a lamp down or something.

Photo 11: You know Terry Bullock? Well that's him there. He used to play tennis in the 50s. That's Terry Bullock, the one in the middle is Ray Cobbin – it was his brother Kenny Cobbin who was killed at Box Flat. And this is John Healing, he was my mate, he wheeled with me.

Photo 12: See that silver part there, that's the case of the battery. They used to be in stainless steel case, the batteries, but then they got like a rubber-type case, they were just black.

Photo 13: He is leaning up against a prop that holds the roof.

And they are obviously just wearing shorts there. Was it hot down the mine?

Oh yeah, well see how they work, I know some of them used to get around with a pair of undies on, that's all they had on, it was very hot. Specially in at the face where the air wasn't real good. If you were putting a hole through what they used to say, if I was working say up here and another fellow was working the same way, and we had to break off and put a hole to connect, well once you put that

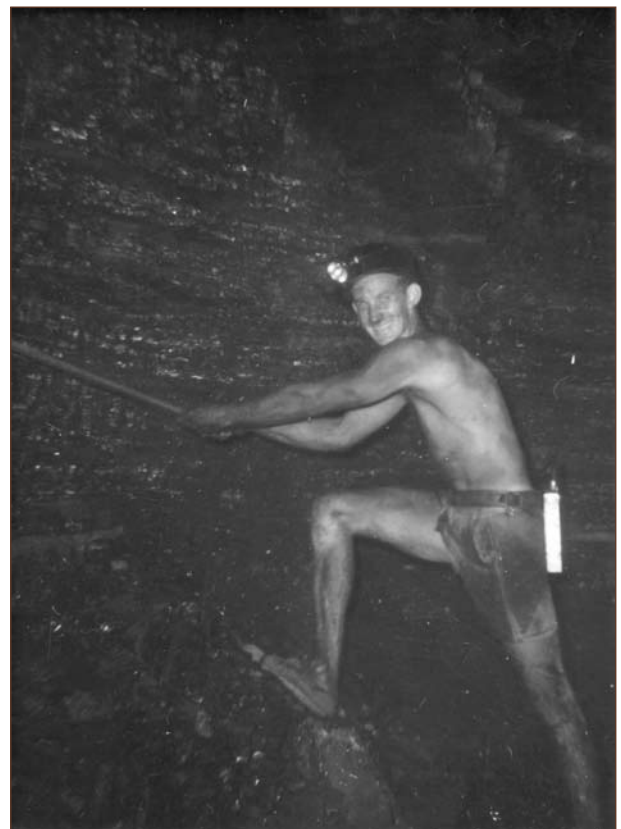


Photo 12: ".. that silver part there, that's the case of the battery. They used to be in stainless steel case..."

through you had a circuit of air round and it wasn't to bad till you progressed further. The only way they brought air into you they'd put up what they called brattice – its was a bag sort of thing and it would hang up all the way which is suppose to bring the air up to you and take it around that, but there were leaks everywhere – it didn't work out.

Some of them ended up, if it was real bad, they had a big blower in there. It was an enormous big electric motor with a blower in it – gee it made some noise! It frightened the devil out of a policeman out there one day. The New Hope company had a mine, they were putting a tunnel down near the lake out at Swanbank just over the road from the lake. We were down a fair way but they hadn't connected up a fan or anything to it and they were using this blower. Now the blower was like I said probably a 5 foot long, big round thing, looked like a jet engine and it had a big fan in it and it used to have a tube on it, and when it wasn't working the tube would be closed up. The tube would be something like 2 foot across, just a flat canvas-type tube, it would be flat. But as soon as you hit the switch and got the blower she'd blow out with a bang! And it would all blow out.

Anyway this policeman came down one day and he came down a little way, you know, and he didn't need a light, there was enough light from the surface to see. The blower was off, so the bloke who was working there, he was a bit of a larrikin. [The policeman] came down, "What you doing down here fellas, starting a new mine?" "Yeah yeah yeah" he said "you wanna be careful sometimes these things blow up, you know". And he hit the button and it went off...well...the copper went straight for his gun, and then decided no that's no good. It gave him a hell of a fright That's was one of the things they used to use those big blowers, noisy things.

Track 13

Did you enjoy working in the mines?

Well I enjoyed working in the mines, working in the mines is a bit different to working anywhere else because you always have people around you, especially if you're in a crew, and you look after one another because its not real safe down there – no matter what. Anything can happen at any time so rely on others and of course its handy too when you come to the surface and you're pretty dirty and you have to go and have a shower and you line up in a row and you wash one another's back. Otherwise how are you going to wash your back, 'cause you get really dirty really black. And that's what it used to be in the bathroom.

In the bathroom itself which we spoke about before, in the shower room which was all part of it, like you went from your clean room, through the shower room into the dirty room, that sort of thing like I said before. But the shower part of it, I don't know how many showers, probably 50 showers or more there, and it was in a narrow sort of a strip



Photo 13: "He is leaning up against a prop that holds the roof."

probably something like around about 12 feet wide and the full length of the building which would be something like 30 feet. There is a lot of you in there having a shower at the same time so when it comes time to get your back washed it was no problem cause I wash the back of the fella in front of me and someone behind me washes my back. But when you get to the back and there is nobody there you have to make sure you pop around to the front and get your back washed. And that's what I liked about that part of it – you would always come home clean.

Although I can remember one time, they had a boiler there to supply the hot water, when I first started in the mines, they used to pump water out of the dam. But later on specially at New Hope, it was town water there and you'd go up to have your shower, "There's no hot water boys" - someone forgot to put the match in the coal or something to warm it up so you'd have a cold shower. That would be good at 2'o'clock in the morning in winter. But the worst part was when they said "There's plenty of hot water but there's no cold water", well that was almost impossible. You'd turn it on and it would be really hot water, so you'd make a run through it, soap yourself up a bit, but eventually you'd get sick of it and put your clothes back on and go home and have a shower then, cause it was absolutely hopeless. There is no way in the world you can have a shower in hot water – no way it will burn you. I've done that a few times.

I remember one time too we had a lot of heavy rain, which we could do with now, and it rained and rained and rained. Many a time the water used to come across

that bridge just below the power station, it is part of the Bundamba Creek, that flat area there, and you couldn't get home. So of course this is in the middle of the night/early part of the morning. "Well you won't get past these boys, you know, the waters over there". So I went for a drive down there and sure enough, and you have to be careful in the night with water cause you sort of can't pick it up, I had the car, so anyway the next thing I realise the wiper blades stopped working in the car and I thought oh this is great, this is really good.

So anyway one bloke he was in another car there and he said blow this I'm going back to the bath house, he said I'm going to go have a sleep there and stay there. I said no, I'm going to have a go I'll go another way, so eventually I went around and I come up right round the lake, up onto a hill. I sort of knew the road but the trouble was it was raining, it was dark, the wipers weren't working and there were no lines to show you whether you were on a road or over it, it was all black coal sort of stone that had been dumped there, and that was the road over it, it was pretty dicey I tell you. So anyway eventually I did that and I was able to get over the Bundamba bridge, it was just underneath and that got me home. I was lucky that night, it was just all the rain you know. It would be good if we can get it now.

Track 14

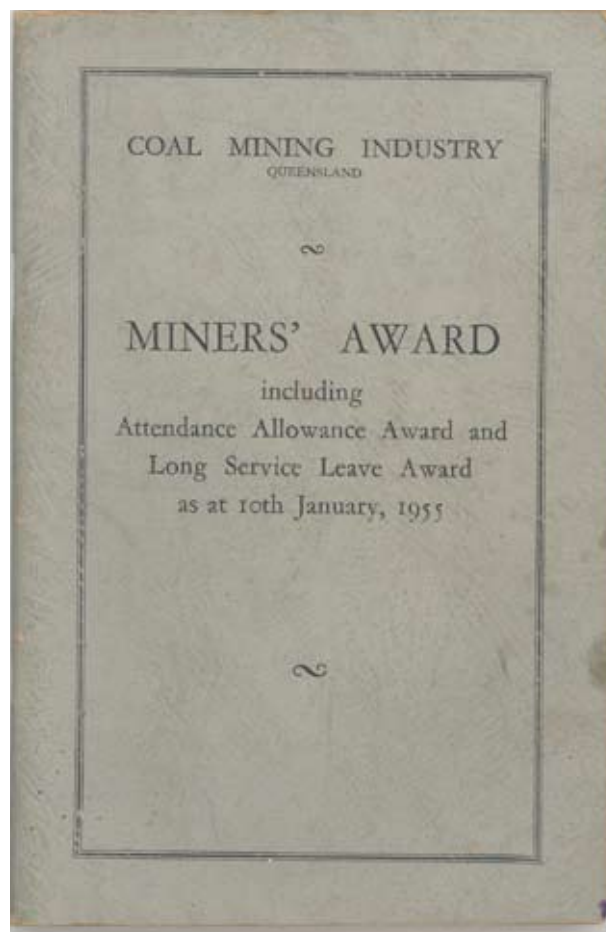
That's something I meant to ask you, when you first started in the mine and you were on contract, did you get basic things like holiday pay and so on, on that system?

No, it kicked off in the very early days that you didn't get – you could take time off, because I can remember that we had a bit of a building down there at Surfers Paradise. In those days I'm talking about '45, '46 -at Surfers Paradise all that was there was a pub and a shop and a service station and there was some family members back somewhere who had a bit of a cottage thing down there. We used to go down there, we could take a fortnight off but there was no holiday pay, you weren't paid for it. That did come in later on of course. But sick pay, there was no such thing as sick pay, not in those days. But eventually we used to get, if my memory is right, about eight days a year and you could accumulate them, if you didn't take them you got another eight the next year. A lot of them used to take them as they got them and say they were sick and go to the races or whatever, you know, but I didn't bother.

When I retired I had 140 sick days accrued and of course at that time you were paid out at the present rate and you could roll it over when you retired too, so you could take it with you. So I gained there with that part of it when I retired, but no, they didn't pay you much, not in the early days they didn't.

What about Workers Compensation if you were injured?

Oh, yeah, there was always compensation. For the length



Pic 12: Cover of 1951 Miners' Award

of time I was in the mines, those 42 years, I was on compo probably two or three times, but there was always Workers Compensation as far as I can remember. Yeah, there was no problem with that, but of course you had to get a doc's certificate and everything. When they brought the sick days in they had it that way that (I don't know what its like now), but they had it that way that you could have two days off sick and there was a form to sign out at the mine office, you had to put your name down that you were sick and you'd be paid for that, for those two days, no problem. But if you had three days or more you had to have a doctor's certificate, so you'd have to go and see the doctor and get a doctor's certificate and that would cover you then, for ever how long or however many sick days you'd accumulated. I don't know what its like now though.

Did you ever have any periods where there was no work in the mine?

No, I was pretty lucky with that. Some of the mines shut down, well I left Blackheath, it was still going strong when I left there. I went over to Sunrise, it was ok but then it came up to round about the early 60s that things were getting a bit dicey there and they looked like they were going to shut that and leave Edward S Cornwall open. They wanted two men to go over there [to Cornwall]. So the Union said "Righto its got to be done in seniority". So I was one of the top blokes in seniority because by

this time I'd been there a long time, cause in them days there was a lot of turn over in the mines. People would come and they would work in the mine and they'd go somewhere else, they'd hear someone making big money at Oakleigh and they'd go up there or whatever. But I didn't, I stayed where I was and of course my seniority was right on top and there was another fellow whose seniority was on top. He was a bit senior to me, so he was top, I was next.

So it worked out that we were the two that were supposed to go over to Cornwall and that was the rulings of the Union. So anyway, for some reason they wanted me to go over but they didn't want this other fellow to go over, so I thought, "Well how could I go over? He's the first one to go over" - because this was when seniority was a big thing in the mines. I don't know whether it is now, so anyway they talked about it for a while, anyway the Union came up and said you go over and then we'll try and work out with this other fellow to go over, you know, so that's how I went over there then. Eventually it did shut down and there was quite a few came over to Cornwall, so I was lucky there.

Well then, I left Cornwall because things were starting to go down a bit there, and I could have had a job at Southern Cross. That was another mine out near there, I could have had a job there or I could've have a job at New Hope, so I took New Hope. So I started there and I worked right through, so actually no I didn't have any time off at all really. I was lucky that way because a lot of them did.

Some of them left, and they went I know, that some of them from Sunrise went and worked at the Goodna Hospital and they became male nurses and all the rest, well my mate did that, Johnnie Healing, he became a male nurse down at, I think it was at Goodna. Or was it up here at Sandy Gallop, one of them and others became something else, they just went out the mining industry all together.

Track 15

Something we didn't come back to earlier was your grandfather and father and their experiences, you said your grandfather was killed in a mining accident.

Yeah, he was working at Sunrise, I think it was Sunrise because Bonnie Dundee had another mine they called Bonnie Dundee Number One which I never ever saw, it was way before my time. My father used to talk about it, I don't know whether he worked there but I think he did. But I think the accident happened at Bonnie Dundee Sunrise Mine and they were working together and there was a fall and he got caught in the fall. They got him out, but what had happened was or what I believe is, he had broken a rib and it had pierced his lung and today, well they could fix it, but in those days they didn't, this was in 1933. He went into hospital and he died in hospital, so I was only three at the time and I don't remember it.



Photo 13: At Sunrise Mine

Father, he had time off in the Depression and him and a mate of his, they bought a truck and they went 'on the wood' as he used to say. "I went on the wood", they used to sell wood because everybody had wood stoves them days, you know, you'd bring wood - so much a ton for the wood. But he said, oh, he did give me a figure there one time, the expenses were more than he made for the week. So it didn't work out real good.

I can remember the truck, it was an old Chev truck, around about 1927 or something like that. I can remember that as a kid, so that must have been the early 30s. I don't remember my grandfather in '33 but I do remember that truck for some reason, maybe because I was interested in trucks or something, I don't know.

So they had a bad time my parents and they raised five of us and they went through the Depression. He used to work about three days a week in the mine, they'd get an order, say the butter factory wanted so much coal - so many tons, so they produced that, delivered it to the butter factory and then there was no more orders. When another order would come in they'd get the blokes to come and dig it out sort of thing and that went on for a while too. Then of course the war come and once the war come well, everybody had work and of course he didn't go, he was a bit too old to go into the army and he was classed as essential work so they wouldn't have took him anyway because they had different things that classed if it was an essential job, well they didn't take him away. So he missed out on that, the army too.

Track 16

Yeah, it was a pretty hard time, although us kids couldn't complain, we had a home, they bought that home up the hill up here. They had it built and they managed to keep above water paying it somehow, I don't know how. Used to grow a lot of vegetables, my father. The whole backyard was full of garden and mum wouldn't have to buy any vegetables or anything, it all come from there. I can remember one side of the house was absolutely full of cauliflowers, you know and things like that. Then he used to have chooks. He used to come down here to Peter Thompson, had a hatchery just down the road here and they used to - it, was a big hatchery in fact it come right back to here. They had fowl pens even here and um, he had an incubator, one of the latest incubators. I remember going down there, and ah it was from America I think. It would hatch out a thousand eggs in one hit and automatically turn them, you know you've got to turn an egg and that sort of thing and he'd get all these chicks and then they'd de-sex, I think it was, de-sex the chicks. Peter Thompson, his son went to some school to learn how to do this and then they'd get the chick and they'd check it, oh that's a cockerel, that's a hen.

They didn't want the cockerels, they wanted the hens see and course you could buy them cockerels then for a penny each. He'd buy them and he'd raise them up there and kill them off and pluck them and everything. We'd have chook, you know. So, we didn't miss anything really. Mum used to always say, "oh, you didn't have a good life" and I said "we had a good life mum, don't you worry about that! You ask any of us, they'd all tell you the same" but it must have been tough, yeah, it must have been tough.

Of course once the war came, well the mining industry just kicked off again and it stayed that way right up until the end of the war and even getting into the fifties before it started to slacken back again.