



“Christmas Puddings!”

‘Bert’

I started working at the colliery on 15th August 1955 at 6 o’clock in the morning. That was the day I was 15. I started on the morning of my birthday.

The manager here was one of the real old types, Wilfred Short, and this colliery was a family colliery.

My grandfather worked here. He retired before I started. In fact, he had died before I started. My father worked here. My brother worked here. I worked here. I started in ‘screens’. All the coal coming up would go through the screens to be graded. The muck would be picked out of it. The lump coal and the small coal would be separated. I was on the side of a conveyor chucking the muck off. I went from there and I worked with a bricklayer for a twelve month. So a lot of the later building around here, I helped to build.

Coming from Crumlin to the offices, there was a concrete path. I helped to put that down. There was brick walls, along by here, that we built and they filled it in with ashes and muck, far earlier than they should have and the wall fell over. Then I went from there then and I joined the electricians. You was privileged if you could get in with them. That was a really (good job).

In the Powerhouse, you’d have electric compressors which had replaced steam compressors. They had a Walker Steam Compressor and it had a 25 foot flywheel.

They took one of the fan engines and that is in the Maritime Museum in Swansea. The nuts holding the engine down were that size (6 inches) and as you can imagine, although they were steel, not stainless steel or anything like that, but they shone as bright as buttons. It was never painted because everything was polished with oil. My cousin, a guy called Charlie Sharp, worked in the Fanhouse. Over the Christmas period, well just before the Christmas period, they had painters from Abercarn painting the colliery, and all their paint was in the Fanhouse. So, Charlie decided, out of boredom, to paint all these big nuts holding the engine down, and one thing and another. And there was bloody murder after Christmas! These nuts had been like this since 1908 up to 1960. And then he come along and painted them.

And on top of that, in the corner, they used to have a little cabin where it was the switchboard. So, if you was down the pit, you turned a generator and it rang up in the Fanhouse. And he’d go there, and he’d say, ‘Yes’ and you’d say, ‘I want to speak to the

manager, or whoever', he'd plug you through. He (Charlie) decorated that too... Christmas puddings on the wall! So Charlie was took out and sent back to work in the boilers.

In those days there were real characters about. They are gone now. The sad part about it, is that when we lost our pit, all our collieries. We lost our movers and shakers for the community.

I mean, when you think that this colliery, up the Black Vein in the east, we had 22 foot (vertical) of coal. Now you imagine a coal face in front of you, 22 foot high. They used to work about 8 foot of it and support the rest. Then they would crash it down once the face went on, they'd crash it down and they would backfill that onto the conveyors.

So we had 22 foot of face, and in the west where I done my training, you'd be lucky if you had 20 inches. I worked in a seam where I couldn't turn over. If you was on your stomach and you wanted to get on your back , you'd have to come out and turnover and go in on your back. That's how low it was.

Now Wilfred Short, I'd see him... now colliers would fill 300 drams of coal in a day. And if he had 5 or 6 drams of muck picked in the screens, out of this coal, he'd have the colliers up, on top of the pit, and he'd say, 'That's how much muck we had from what you filled yesterday, or the day before or whatever. 'Now I do pay you to fill coal, not muck.'

To be honest, it was possibly the hardest job I ever had... but it was the most enjoyable. You could enjoy coming to work.

