

Interview with Mr Jim Needs

The interview was carried out on the 6.2.14. The aim of the interview was to gain an understanding of the working conditions within the phurnacite plant. Also I strived to establish what social activities were available to the workers and what impact the plant had on the local community, and its residents. Mr Needs signed an agreement form, which stated he was willing for me to share the given information with third parties.

Key

- Question.
- Answer.

- What was your job at the plant?
 - I was a Gas man. This job involved working in the oven area. I was in charge of discharging blocks and isolating them.

- How long did you work at the plant and at what age did you start working there?
 - I started working at the plant when I was 26 years old. I was there for 24 years, from 1966 to 1989. The work shift patterns were 8 hour shifts and these were split between days and nights.

- What are your memories of working in the plant? By this I mean working conditions and the comradeship amongst workers?
 - My memories of working in the plant are mostly good. There was good comradeship amongst the workers and the wages were good. The safety and working conditions were very poor when I started working at the plant, however this did improve over time and the introduction of helmets with a respiratory fan to prevent the workers breathing in excess dust and fumes, was a big step forward. Most people seemed to enjoy working there.

- Were there any social events for the workers, such as football teams or days out?
 - There was a plant football team and darts team. These teams participated against other teams from various other types of industry. There were various social clubs and events centred on the plant.

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- What impact did the closure of the plant have on you? Also how about the surrounding community, in regards to job losses.
 - The plant employed over a thousand people, so the closure of the plant obviously was negative in terms of unemployment. As I have said many people were happy to work there. I think it closed because the access to coal was getting limited in the area and the plant was getting old.

- What did you do after the plant closed?
 - I was lucky to find employment with Cynon valley buses. This job involved preparing the buses ready to be painted. I was employed in this job for 15 years.

- Can you think of any other interesting information in regards to working at the phurnacite plant?
 - We had to apply barrier cream before starting work to stop the skin burning in the heat of the oven. We then also had to apply more cream after showering, after work. If this cream was not applied it left the skin very sensitive to the sun.

Thank you for your time Mr Needs and the valuable insight you have given me into the working conditions and social aspect surrounding the phurnacite plant Abercwmboi.

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