

## Eddie Lloyd Davies, The Village, Bodelwyddan

### Rhydymwyn

I'm Eddie Lloyd Davies and I'm originally from Halkyn and my family has had quite a long connection with Rhydymwyn. My father, Oscar Davies, he was an electrician and worked there for some time, during the War. My uncle was the Halkyn Lead Mine accountant, Claridge Horner, and he dealt with a lot of the incoming people, who came to Rhydymwyn to build the plant and to run it. I still have contact with people who worked there, from the very beginning up until the end of the War. Sam Skidmore is a friend. He is 87 and lives in Devon and has quite a remarkable collection of stories and anecdotes. I also have contact with one of the surviving shift charge engineers, one of only four or eight and he lives in Runcorn and I speak to him quite often about the site and he has a very clear recollection of what went on there. I went to work in ICI in the early sixties. ICI, of course, built the site. I went to work for the firm that did all the civil engineering on the site, a firm called JB Edwards of Whiteleaf, who did a lot of government contracts of the day. I actually worked with many men who built the building and were involved in the tunnelling. A good friend of mine, Joseph Light, who worked for the Halkyn Lead Mine Company, he actually went to work for JB Edwards. He was loaned to them, with respect to a lot of the tunnelling work that went on there and a lot of the reinforced concrete side of the buildings. He sadly died in the mid eighties. My father worked there, I'm not sure what year it was, but he recalled some of the scientists being brought from Chester station, not all came to Rhydymwyn station, being picked up by the work's car and being brought to the site and he remembers seeing some of the top scientists that were involved with the Tube Alloys project. I've been in contact with quite a few of the people that worked there, Dave Jones from Denbigh, who was a fireman. When I worked for ICI, I mainly worked in Castner Kelner works and I also worked in Rock Savage, which had a direct link with what was going on in Rhydymwyn. Some of the original chemical we were using in Rhydymwyn were originated at Castner's at Rock Savage works and, of course, at Randles. I used to go to Randles works because JB Edwards, the firm I used to work for, had men on site and I was always intrigued by the place which was, in the early sixties, could only be described as in a state of being mothballed. They had part of Randles works that was owned by the Dept. of Defence of the United States and periodically the particular plant involved was started up and run. It was always a very mysterious and interesting and intriguing site, the Randles works. I used to know the gate man there and he used to tell me of the trains that used to come from Rhydymwyn that used to come in the early sixties, bringing back the chemical weapons for destruction by the Destruction Unit at Randles. I used to know a man who worked on the combustion chamber into which they used to pump the vesicant. This man, his job was to clean out the chamber. He used to wire brush it and clean it and he was given the wrong chemical weapon protection suit as it had eye holes and his arms became very badly affected by the mustard gas and was taken away from the site and was unable to work anywhere near Randles, or any other chemical site for that

matter, because he used to come out in great big blister every time he got, every time he ingested chlorine or similar chemicals. I worked with a man called Stanley Owen, who used to be a despatch rider and he used to ride between the tankers, when they used to come out of Castner's or Rock Savage up to Rhydymwyn and it always intrigues me, when he used to tell me these stories about the distance between the tankers of being something in the region of a quarter of a mile gap, where multiple tankers were sent up...

***This was road tankers?***

Road tankers, yes, the old Scammel Road Tankers and those stories always interested me greatly. My father, when he worked there, never said much. That's one of the things that always made me very interested about the site, was the relative lack of wanting to discuss the place. Everyone was very, very cagey about it.

***They took the Official Secrets Act very seriously.***

They did, yes.

***And there was a War on, don't forget.***

My father, he was actually an electrician, and had worked in munitions. He had previously worked in Hooton Park on the Wirral, on munitions, and came to Rhydymwyn. The one thing he often said, apart from the massive number of people from other parts of the country, which was unusual in our part of the world then. It was a welsh speaking area and he could never quite get over these people with strange accents and different cultures, cultures of swearing which he had never come across before. When he actually came to do his job, he could never understand why when he was given a schematic to say why a re-motor drive, why he only ever had part of the drawing. He never had from the push button to the motor, he had part of the drive and that was it and somebody else did the other bit.

***That was general was it, whatever he had to repair, he was only shown just enough?***

Yes, he was given only partial ....The other interesting thing as well, which I though was quite funny was that the foreman asked him one night, when he went on shift that he wanted some plugs and sockets wiring in but because of the conditions in the War, the materials were very scarce, the foreman asked him to make the two plugs, he actually made them from Tufnell, gave him a block of Tufnell and my father had to carve and cut out the plug and put it in brass bar for the actual parts of the plug that go into the socket. My dad, who worked previously for Courtaulds, a chemical type industry, had never, ever come across or had this request. He'd never made one before and he actually did make two sockets on the shift and put them in, something which he never forgot.

***Were there different levels of security for the workers who were maintaining the place?***

That he never commented on. My Dad didn't comment on it. He found it very difficult to co-exist. He always said to me that some of these foremen he had to work for, had extremely foul mouths and he actually hit somebody. Somebody asked him in an alien, strange way and the only thing he could think of doing was to hit the man and I think he didn't get on too well from that moment on.

***I suspect he didn't.***

My father subsequently ended up as a senior electrical engineer in the CGB.

***In some ways he was quite happy to be out of it, whenever he got away from it?***

Subsequently he was quite interested, because my father went then into the Army, because he'd been at Hooton, he was in a reserved occupation and he went from there to work in the War Office in London and spent the rest of his military service in the War Office. I was taken down as a young baby, down to live in London, away from the safety of North Wales. When people talk about the War, I'm very much aware as to how bad things were. In the part of London where we lived, it was not far from Battersea Power Station and V1's were targeted on power stations.

***They were targeted because they just wanted to destroy them.***

So, that was my father's history.

***So, he went there as a reservist, as War occupation, not as a willing person saying give me a job please? He was told to go there?***

Quite correct, he worked in Courtaulds, served his time in Courtaulds and then came inducted into the munitions side of the War effort.

***Which I take it, most of the people working at the factory, were the same. It was war work, as such?***

Yes. If you take Joe Light, the man I mentioned who worked for JB Edwards and he is mentioned in quite a few different writings on the subject, Joseph Light was a miner, a lead miner and quite a good one. He eventually ended up working for JB Edwards, the civil engineers on site and a friend of mine, called Johnny Waterhouse who used to service the compressors and the lorries working on the site at Rhydymwyn. He used to say what a good burner old Joe Light was. He used to do a lot of the reinforced steel bar work that went into a lot of the buildings that you're having great fun demolishing now. These people were multi skilled in many ways. This is the remarkable thing about these people, that they put in so many hours and they did things without question.

***It was built very quickly, wasn't it?***

It was. In fact, I have had contact from one of the main civil engineers. I don't know if you've had contact with him, Sir Eric Driver and he's still alive. He's about 86 and lives in mid-Cheshire and is very lucid. He was actually responsible for....after the flooding in '41, the winter of '41?

***When the factory had been built and it flooded, didn't it?***

Yes. Sir Eric Driver was the civil engineer responsible for further work on the River Alyn.

***They put a second tunnel in, didn't they?***

That's right.

***Tunnelling? Did you get involved or know anyone who was working on the tunnels?***

Only Joe Light and this is the said thing, there was so many people I could have spoken to, I knew a lot of the people that worked because it was so closely tied to the lead mining. Anybody that I knew that worked in Halkyn Lead Mines and bear in mind that when I first, when I came back from ICI, I went away to work for ICI through the sixties, and I came back in the late sixties, a lot of these people were still about, that had worked in the lead mines and in the tunnels. The tunnels were built in remarkably fast time, you know.

***There was a War on, so.***

The distance that they mined was quite considerable.

***Did any of the miners that you knew, have experience of working on the site, as a lead mine prior to it's.....***

No. the lead mining there was very much earlier. The mine in the corner of the site, in the North end of the site hadn't been mined for some time. Most of the miners close to Rhydymwyn, the MSF factory, simply worked at the Olwyn Goch.

***Because there were on the ..... (?), underneath the site. There had been extensions to the main drives from there, made only a few years previously. I guess they were looking to win new ore from other lead mines, not from the brick shaft maybe. It was never clear, the brick shaft was open until the eighties, and it was never clear quite whether they had made a connection through from the lead mines to brick shaft on the site or not.***

I have no knowledge on that at all. A lot of people knew different things about it but they were reluctant to talk about it.

***They didn't talk, did they?***

No, even now William Hennie who is the senior shift charge engineer, who was one of the only four or eight, or however many there were, somebody was interested in talking to him, obviously, because of his uniqueness. He was a person who would have a greater over view of the whole place and I had a word with him and said that, it wasn't the discredited programme, it was an earlier TV programme that they were doing, and the producer said to me, 'Do you think he would be prepared to talk?' I wrote him a letter, first of all, and said what was in mind and he then rang me and said, 'If you can give me details about the questions these people are going to ask. I want to see it in writing.'

***Very wise.***

So, they wrote back to him and he spoke to the producer after and he declined. He said, 'I really don't want to talk about it.' I've got a lot of interesting comments from him. I have an archive here that is of interest and there are comments by him that are of great interest. In other five or six years, these people are just not going to be about. We're not going to be able to get the information from them and I think it is important.

***Any reminiscences of the factory working and the problems there may have been or spillages?***

No, only from what I've read.

***We spoke to a woman yesterday, who was an inspector in the filling of the mustard, or the syrup, into the containers and listening to her, and she was lucid, it gave the impression that it was very uneventful given that it was dangerous and she was paid danger money, given she wore full protective clothing, it was uneventful.***

I get that impression as well from people that I've spoken to. The Stanley Owen that was the despatch rider, he used to go with the road takers, he within ICI, he was a lab assistant and worked with hydrochloric acid. He worked with some of the original people that developed hydrochloric acid, which was incredibly dangerous. In fact, most of the people in the chemical industry that I came to work in, I wouldn't say they were blasé, but they developed a knowledge which made their handling of the various products almost routine and routinely safe.

***It's the same principle as Nitro-glycerine. Once it's down in principles, you accommodate it. How about on the decommissioning side, any knowledge there?***

Only from what I've read. The best source of information is Toller's work, Major Toller 'After the Battle'. Knowing what I knew, I only met the one worker, the one who used to break out in blisters, the one who used to burn the vesicant., he was the only person that I knew and had spoken to that actually had hands on involvement, the others were just anecdotal stories that had bounded in the Runcorn and Widnes area. When I was there, the decommissioning of the weaponry had only been carried out five or six years previous, so it was still fresh in people's minds. Coming back to the business of not talking, this was the biggest problem. I actually worked in Runcorn Heath for some time, the Munn (?) Division HQ and there were people like Eric Driver who was the chairman of the board of Munn Division. People like Jimmie Gerrard; he had a non executive position on the board. Cyril Blackbird had a similar position. Both, all of those three, all helped build Rhydymwyn. They were all on the civil side. So, I worked in and amongst these people, but, as I say, they just didn't talk.

***It's amazing, because as I've said to the other people, there was a railway running along side it and it was public knowledge that the factory was there, okay it was painted in camouflage, so from a distance, looking into the valley you wouldn't know it was there, but it's still remarkable, the lack of knowledge we have of it. We've been given historical stuff anyway, but people won't talk. It is amazing that they won't talk, yet other things of sixty years ago, people are quite happy to talk.***

Yes.

***Do you think this is the works nature?***

Yes, it is, because if you think about it, we provided very convenient holes in the ground for the Barnes Wallis bombs, the bouncing bombs and some of the other bombs were kept over in Holywell in the Grange network of caves. There was Manod, where a lot of the arts treasures went, near Blaenau Ffestiniog. We had a whole history of putting stuff underground. We had kept for some time big piles of explosives in the Halkyn Mine network, prior to second War and I think this was predicated on the fact that they knew that people wouldn't talk about, people would keep quiet about it.

***I suppose they keep quiet about lots of things. They're not actually forthcoming?***

Especially to outsiders.

***But, even then with your Dad, same principle, he wouldn't chat?***

No. there was one story I forgot to mention was the village I lived in was an estate village and it was dominated by the castle and they had gamekeepers there and one of the gamekeepers was called Bill Brooks and he was involved in the Home Guard. There were various Home Guard exercises based around Rhydymwyn. Bill was telling me, that they had to take the site against some

regulars, or they could have been territorials, I don't know which, and Bill was quite adamant that he got into the tunnel network by going down vents, on a rope and caused quite a bit of surprise and anger by the defenders. I also, a friend of mine Sam Skidmore....

***Did they guard the vent after that?***

That, I don't know. Bill never said.

***Again, you see.***

Sam Skidmore told me, he was also associated with the Home Guard element of activities at Rhydymwyn and he needed to go somewhere. It was quite an urgent task that he had to do, so he had a word with the officer in charge of the local Home Guard and said, 'I need to be wherever it is this evening. Could you make me dead?' And so the planning officer said, 'Okay, we'll have you shot in the first few minutes, so you won't need to be here.' It emphasises the slightly home spun attitude to some of the aspects of defence.

***You mentioned one of the people you worked with was on the, presumably it was the destructor incinerator was it? Was that at Randle?***

At Randle.

***So you never really found out about the destruction facilities or any burning that went on at Rhydymwyn?***

No. that was...all that I knew about was the trains that went from Rhydymwyn. Bear in mind, again its peculiar when you go back, remind me before you go, I've got a lot of photographs...a friend of mine, we used to knock around as a lad, we used to move around a lot in the are of Mold and Rhydymwyn and, naturally, we used to go to the racetrack, on the Antelope field and a lot of my teen years I spent hours stood on the air raid shelter, at the bottom of the Antelope field, down opposite the cave buildings there and watching motorcyclists risk life and limb going round. There used to be car racing there, as well. My friend Martin, he took a whole pile of photographs, unusually, and when he retired to Spain, not long back, he gave me the negatives, so I have had quite a few of them developed, so I have quite a few interesting pictures, that will show the post war usage of part of the site.

***Because, it's quite intriguing that as it was decommissioned, it was used to store things.***

Yes. A friend of ours, George Barker, he was a Halkynite and I was at Castner Kelner works one day and I saw this wagon coming through the site with a crown and some logo on the side indicating a government department and I said, 'What are you doing here, George?' And he said, 'I'm working in Rhydymwyn and I'm collecting hydrogen from Castner's and taking it to put in the tunnels.' 'Oh, yes,' I said, 'and what else do they keep in the tunnels, George?' 'Loads of beds,' he said, 'hospital beds. I've never seen so many

hospital beds.’ This has all added to the intrigue. My wife used to work for the Department of Employment and she was given a guided tour round British Aircraft, BAC is it, when it was then Hawke Sydney and one of the points that was made to her then was, ‘Oh yes, we have a storage problem here with a lot of the jigs for the them obsolescent aircraft,’ the likes of vampire that they used to service there,’ and we keep these jogs at the Rhydymwyn factory. They store them for us.’

***It doesn't surprise me.***

So that shows the pattern of how the place was seen.

***It was just seen as a good storage place. It was also secure with a fence and a guard.***

All the years I went....There was a lad I went to school with and he used to go in regularly. I'd say, ‘Where did you go at the weekend.’ ‘Oh,’ he said ‘I’ve been through the fence at Rhydymwyn.’ This was say about ’54, ’55 and he’d found all sorts of things in there, mercury and different bits and bobs. There were odd people who used to go in there and relieve the government of bits and ends, you know.

***Well you would, at that stage.***

Well, there were odd people who used to go in and relieve the government of odds and ends.

***It became a problem because they used to nick the wire, not realising it was dangerous.***

Yes, because round about the 80’s period, when it was opened up for contractors, there was some contractors working in there, I believe there were buildings that were altered and bits were removed.

***I suspect. There were lots of people breaking in just as we inherited the site and nicking all the copper wire, that's why the ladders were taken down, because things were inherently dangerous.***

Well, yes, because when I worked at Rock Savage works, the interesting thing about Rhydymwyn was, of course, that it was like I’d lived two or three hundred yards from Rock Savage works, I used to live on a farm, in the little village of Clifton, outside of the works and I used to go on my motorbike, along the track and I used to go in the gate at Rhydymwyn, of Rock Savage works, and as I used to go in, a lot of the buildings in Rhydymwyn were identical. They were buildings that were transplanted from Castner’s and Rock Sos (?) and they’d been moved and just dumped in this little valley in North Wales. A lot of the civil engineers who I knew, who had worked on the design and build of these, all said, Rock Savage works, when we designed it, the piling and actual structures were designed with a life expectancy, and I’m almost sure it wasn’t a lot more than 15 years or something like that. It was a figure of about



that amount. We'd all used to laugh and say here we are in 1966 and it's still standing. I was there when the explosion happened, when the HF plant went up in '67 and there were three people killed.

***Where was this?***

In Rock Savage. The hydrogen gasometre exploded and the top of the gasometre went up in the air, it went 400 feet in the air virtually intact and when it came down it landed on the methynol stock tank and it also hit the HF plant. It was quite a bang, I can tell you.

***I bet.***

Our caravan, we used to live in a caravan then, it was lifted off its wheels. My wife was in it at the time. I was in work and one of my friends who worked for JB Edwards, he was asleep in his wagon waiting to be loaded by a digger and within, difficult to say exactly how long, but I would say within three to four weeks he went from being sort of a mousy colour to white. He opened his eyes at the minute of the fireball and he saw two men who were killed, flying through the air, going through a pipe bridge. They were blown through a pipe bridge. The site was on a hill. When people find it difficult that I should have all this interest in this sort of thing, because of my experience with ICI and seeing the things I did....

***It was almost normality for you.***

Yes, it was, and I was very interested in the mining side, because I had spent quite a bit of time probing and looking in to the myriad of different old mines that there are in our part of North Wales and I used to go down some of them. The mining angle always interested me.

***This book called Project X, all the information came from public archives?***

Most of the information came from quite a big ICI archive. Quite a lot of the original documents concerning the building of the place and the various extensions and modifications that were done and Tim Jones, who is the author, Tim did a lot of work in the PRO and with documentation there. I would say the archives I had were made available to Tim. They would have given him about 20% probably. A lot of the stuff, with him being based in London, he's spent some considerable time in the PRO actually researching there.

***If that was 20, where did the rest come from?***

There was a lot of anecdotal. Tim's father was actually a policeman. He was a Rhydymwyn bobby and his family had lived in the house, you've probably come across his uncle, Uncle Bill who lives outside the gate. That gentleman is Tim's father's brother. They are very knowledgeable as a family because whereas I lived up the road in Halkyn, Tim's family lived slap bang outside the place. Most of the information came from those sources. Obviously, a lot of it

was difficult, because there were varying dates when information became available from government sources and this made it very, very difficult to represent what went on there accurately. As an example, I made an error when I showed in a diagram that is in the book, the disposition on the storage tunnels and the only available paperwork that we had was an ICI Western Points drawing done by the division engineering department down there. It was more a schematic drawing and they'd scaled the width of the north tunnel down to the front where the River Alyn flowed past, and this was taken, along with the accompanying text that we had with it, that this was, in fact, the fourth tunnel, but it wasn't. As and when we come to do a re-print, we'll correct that.

***You're looking to do a re-print?***

Yes, because I feel, my strongest instinct is that I lived and worked with a lot these people. Some of them have died and I've always felt that these people deserved some sort of recognition for what they did and they weren't able to thump their chest like some people who came back from Africa or Monte Cassino or whatever and these people have just been forgotten. My part of it was, in a sense, to show people what a vitally important part they played and had anything have gone wrong, had Hitler not had this bad experience with gas in the First War and decided to use what he had at IG Farben, some of the weaponry he had there, we'd have had depended so vitally on what went on at Rhydymwyn. If you look in the documentation there, in the depths of the war, when the chemical drain went down and from the War cabinet there was a letter to the ICI engineers saying, "This is vital. We've got to get this thing running again. We've got to get the factory functioning." He was petrified. He wanted the tonnage capacity to be able to react to the Germans, had they have thrown their stuff at us.

***I put it the same level of importance as the munitions factories around and, it's fair to say, there's less recognition of them as perhaps they deserve. It's a general thing, really, not just this site.***

But, I think, in a way, I think the thing that gives this just that little more importance was the fact that that type of warfare, had it been engaged upon, would have had such a hell of an effect on the civilian population of Britain if the Germans had had a go at us with them and, really, it was Rhydymwyn and the other shadow factories, (this has always been a thing that has intrigued me as well, I'd always heard these people talking, at Castner's in Rock Savage, talking about the shadow factories, that Rock Savage was part of it, Randle was, Burntonase (?) in Fleetwood was another one.

***Hillhouse?***

Hillhouse? I used to work at Hillhouse.

***When we were doing some excavation we came across an old plate that had part of an emblem on it. It had MS, for Ministry of Supply and it had the word Valley in the middle of it, as some sort of corporate crockery. It didn't say number three but someone else, probably the gentleman that***

***lives opposite remembered that the crockery had number three stamped on it, and I think the idea was that number one and two were Randle and Rock Savage. On none of the documentation that I've read, have I come across this notation.***

I've never come across it.

***....as number three....***

***Which reinforces the shadowing idea.***

Yes, really when you look at the way the whole thing was constructed, the way in which, if you bring into it the tube alloys project as well, it's just incredible. They should have had this in itself, totally and utterly secret place, and within it....

***It was a fluke that they'd got this big building there. That's what I got there. We've got this building, what do we do with it? Oh, we'll do that then.***

***I think Metropolitan Vicars in Manchester were the suppliers of the kit and this was the nearest, convenient, secure location for that, so it was convenient in a number of ways to them.***

That was something I brought out, because there may well be, when you open up a visitor centre, there may be odd bits of paper that you haven't actually got your hands on and that's just an interesting one about the tunnels. That's the schematic I was saying to you.

***Do you know which document that one came out of? We do have a document that looks similar to that, that was on the design of the tunnels. The interesting thing about that one is you've got the extensions on.***

You see, that's what threw me.

***This must be a later document than the design document?***

That's the '45 one, I think.

***Because it's got the two extensions.***

Those are there, are they? I don't believe it.

***You've got the three entrances.***

***The confusing thing is that, that isn't a tunnel like this, that's just a dimension.***

I should have known that, because I worked in a drawing office.

***So, these were two extensions to increase the capacity of weaponised material. The two transit chambers at the back were for bulk mustard, in lead lined tanks.***

Got you.

***These two here were for weaponised mustard in bonding or storage. They needed to increase the capacity of that, so they then built....***

You must be dreaming about this, at the moment. What I find so difficult is, even though I've been interested in it for a number of years, is I find it difficult to remember all the different aspects.

***Oh, Julian has worked on it for ten years, haven't you?***

***Well, since '96.***

As a matter of interest, did you realise.....I used to sit in an office in the Heath, Runcorn Heath and it'd be '69 and my father working next to me used to say, "Well Eddie, I'm off up to your part of the world now lad."

I'd say, "Where are you going?"

"Rhydymwyn."

I said, "What are you doing there, Tom?"

"I'm going with the Royal Insurance. We're going to have another look at the tanks in the tunnels."

I was still insuring them until 1970, I think it was, which tickled me, these peculiar overlaps that you get, you know. When I said about Randles works, there was a plant in the Randles works called the carbomite (?) plant, and the carbomite plant, every time there was an international crisis fellas in boiler suits used to go and stoke the plant up. Basically, all it was, and why they had to go to ICI in deepest Widnes to make this chemical, it was a stabiliser for gun cotton. It was used in munitions. I used to see these letters, with a big eagle on, sat there. I was talking to a mate next to me, this little individual in this office, talking about it because he used to have to deal with the insurance on that. He dealt with the rating as well, this lad. He was a very handy bloke to know.

***Is that unusual, because, I thought, in the seventies all that stuff had been cleared out?***

But, some of the tanks were still there up until '69.

***Because the last mustard went in 1960. the close up document was dated April 1960. I didn't know there were tanks until later.***

This is part of the problem, because it was very Byzantine in the way it was set up as whole loads of little boxes and now for us to make any sense of it....You've got one of those, I take it?.....(looking at maps)

**What it is, is an old works plan...**

D of E?

**That the Department of the Environment adopted in the late fifties and sixties. There are different versions of that one kicking about at different times. That one is post 1960 and it's got the toxic burials and the clearout of the tunnels marked. I don't know what the dates are on the drawing you've got there?**

September '71. Bloody hell, it is late.

**It is a mixture of things. For example, it shows Antelope field with the tanks before the tunnels were built. These positions here were where the tanks were put whilst they were still building the tunnels. They were moved out of there in '41 or '42. This drawing contains early elements as well as later additions. On this grid system here, each one of these grids has a much more detailed map, showing all the site services as designed.**

I just want to show you a letter from Hennie, because I think, if you get chance, I can always give him a ring sometime, as it would be worth speaking to him because it could be useful just to include them in your archive. I was telling you about Driver, Sir Eric Driver.....What I'd like to do is hand over, if you're going to set up some sort of museum.....(looking through papers)...the man in the Post Office spotted him going round the fence one day. He said, "I saw this lovely old bloke." That's an interesting one from a Booth. (Showing letters to the interviewers) I tell you who did have a terrific archive, and unbiased, was Duncan Campbell. He had a hell of a lot of stuff. There were five shift charge engineers and apparently there was a Lord of the Realm, was once a gateman at Rhydymwyn, someone called James or George Dunn. He was a security man there.

**The two processes of making mustard, that's here. (Looking at more paperwork) One was much more unstable than the other and it had to be warmed up, because the lady yesterday was saying that they filled the containers and then warmed them up overnight.**

Have you got a chemical background?

**No, just been talking to the men.**

I think it helps actually.

**Well, I tend to want to put it into simplistic terms.**

Interesting stuff?

**Yes. They're mostly reminiscences are they?**

What I'll do sometime...Are you based up there a lot now?

***No, I'll be going there very rarely, but there is a permanent site presence there. You've probably met Dave Williams?***

No, I got involved in the book and got a bit brassed off. I couldn't understand why people were just not interested. Obviously, the book has gone really well. I'll give you a circulation list one of these days, where the books have actually gone and the interest there is, but a lot of the people just can't be bothered, a lot of the Rhydymwyn people. I was talking to Diane and she was saying some of the attitudes in the village, 'Oh, you don't want to go on about that.' But, you should be. It's only now, it's the last chance anybody's going to get to get it all written down and have it nicely encapsulated so people in years to come can say what was there and they can get a really good idea and it's not forgotten. A lot of the stuff I've got...that was a whacky one. What we did was, we put "anybody with any reminiscences or comments, please contact us." We, for a while, had been one of the few collection points for all sort of funny stuff and these are electrical and some fella had kept these until 1940 or something. There's one that shows the wiring of the tea urn, I think.

***Top secret stuff!***

This is the rota, I think. (Reads from card) The following rota has been arranged for duties of three senior electricians who are to be called to attend to any faults. There were three of the pour souls. You can just imagine, there was one in Holywell and one in Upton, of all places, getting rung from Rhydymwyn, you know. How the hell we got fuel. Stuff like this, it would be nice if it could be kept together, wouldn't it? There's nobody in my family. My family think I'm a bit potty. What are you interested in that for?

***It's quite intriguing that the ship never happened.***

The what?

***The Italian ship? That was a war time incident.***

***The way he's written it in that letter though, it's covered up.***

***Before we switch the tape off, any other recollections or thoughts that come to mind?***

Well, obviously, I've always been intrigued with the tunnels, because of the family mining background, but the tunnels aren't part of the scope of the present operations.

***They're not going to be touched. They're locked up and that is it. We've had the International Commission for Biological Warfare admit; they can no longer be converted back into normal use.***

They can't be, no.

***They're just empty shells, so they're locked and they'll never be gone into by the public, because of their confined space and lack of ventilation and it's not on. They'll never be opened. The only time you're going to go in there is o check the ceiling's not fallen down. Every three years they'll be a mining inspection. That's it with the tunnels, so they're left alone. The bulk of buildings have gone now, so even walking round, you don't get any impression of what there used to be there as well.***

Sad and yet, in a way, it's a relief that some of the harmful stuff is out of the way.

***Well, the thing is, they were not that harmful.***

They were only harmful if you started bashing them or scratching them.

***But, the locals had this view that the place had to go.***

I think, one of the interesting things as well, just to note is this, I was at Runcorn, I left Runcorn in 1972 and I can remember in the Runcorn paper it said, "News, Randles works to be demolished. Territorial Army to move in. Will have it removed in two months." For the latter days in Runcorn, you could hear these explosions, bang, crash and you'd enquire as to how it was going on and they'd say, "They can't get these buildings down." They said they'd be a push over and quite easy to get rid of. In a sense, here you had this facility, right in the middle of this big population centre, and what did they do with it? They sent it up into the atmosphere, into the sky. In Rhydymwyn, we've had the luxury and the care of government to make sure when it's been taken down, that there's a minimum...

***Locals may not share your view in that.***

I think, by and large, none of them have bothered to open their eyes and understand what actually happened there.

***They didn't want to.***

No.

***They wanted it gone, all trace eroded, gone and the valley put back to what it was, with a stream meandering through it.***

I didn't realise that. It's crazy.

***Yes. The trouble is, with so much intrigue and secrecy and nod, nod, wink, wink; it was very difficult to get rational discussion going.***

Yes, because at the beginning, taking this as the end game for the place, when at the stage where you were doing the test bores and sampling the ground, there was still a fair amount of secrecy.

***There was total mistrust. No matter what you said, they'd go and chat to their mate and because their mate said, "Oh, no," they believed their mate.***

I'm old enough to remember someone asking questions in parliament, Irene White was the Labour MP for East Flintshire through the 50's, and Irene, bless her, she got up in parliament and in one session in '54 or '55 possibly. There'd been rhubarbs in the village saying, "What goes on there? They're doing funny things." Irene White asked questions in parliament and the answer came, do you remember the heavy water that was captured in Norway that was taken to Fakecamp (?) and it was shipped over to Britain and we're storing it in the tunnels. That's where it is. There was some complete cock and bull stories presented to the public. I remember reading it. It was in the local papers, as I say, '54 or '55. In a sense, successive governments have helped to entrench the suspicions, if you like. If they'd have been a little more honest perhaps people would have been...

***Perhaps, but there was a definite attitude that they would always believe their neighbour, rather than what was being told to them and their neighbour didn't really know as they were getting it third hand from someone else.***

Yes.

***Intriguing in the sixties, when it was used as storage and car maintenance and Christmas cracker manufacture, no one worried two hoots about it.***

No, you're right. The sheep were wandering around the site. The Rhydymwyn-ites have probably eaten some of the things that have been grazing on the site.

***For some reason, and I can't get to the bottom of why, I don't think even Julian knows, the government chemists went in.***

***It's very interesting that one.***

***You see my point, that I didn't actually happen.***

***Officially it didn't happen. The incident happened but quite what the details are I don't know.***

If you read in Toller's article, he's done an article on it which may you've not picked up on, on the Barry Harbour incident. I may have a copy of it and I'll put it on one side for you. I think the most important thing now is for the more light that can be cast. Photographs....I seem to remember somebody saying, people haven't been taking photographs, well there's one of the vents.

***You've got some have you?***



Those to me are of great interest.

***They are of interest now, because the site is now very much more overgrown.***

Of course, we don't talk about that.

***What's that? (Shown more photographs)***

That's one side. That was another thing, with the people I worked with in ICI, "where did you go with the tankers?" That's the old lead mining winding gear at Halkyn which is linked.

***It's interesting to see how much scrub has grown up on the site over the years.***

What's the date?

***That's amazing isn't it. That was just after it was decommissioned, I presume.***

That's about '87....

***'82. It's taken twenty years for nature, because that almost looks as if it was mowed.***

One of the things, if you look at the Davies article in the subterranean Brett (?)...

***He got that from us.***

There's a Peter Davies one though.

***Is that the latest one?***

No, the old one and he said any cavers.....That's the only winding gear that can get you into the Halkyn Mine. Apparently you went along the mill level but where the tunnel goes off, to the shaft outside, the brick shaft you call it, you weren't able to go because there was a big pile of scree.

***On the Miller Tunnel, it intercepted the Bryn Cillain vein (?) and there was a cross cutting in that vein and that is what I mentioned to you earlier, did any of the miners have any information as some of the mine drawings show a connection between that cross cutting and the base of the brick shaft and some of them don't.***

This gives rise to the suspicion that the tunnels are linked to the lead mine network.

***If it was done it was a pre-war thing. It was never done as part of the production or utilisation of the factory. People wanted to know, so we sent this caving expedition down, with the help of the Grosvenor Caving Club. They went up to within, probably a few tens of metres of the connection, had it ever been made, but there was a rock fall that they couldn't get through. We'll never know if the final connection was made.***

Someone from the Caving Society said to me, he could never be sure if it was a rock fall or if it'd been filled, because it was a lot like scree. If you think of limestone, limestone doesn't form scree in that manner.

***Whether they've got any mudstone bounds in it, I don't know.***

Basically, you think that all these.....obviously we had to engage suspicions, you know, as people said it was connected. The family of Joseph Lloyd, Joe Lloyd was a miner of some considerable experience, his son, who's a bit older than me, I'm sixty, he's about sixty five or something like that, he'd been given to believe that there was a definite connection, that you could go from the storage tunnels and get into the lead mine network.

***It's not impossible that there was a connection at the base of brick shaft until the Miller Tunnel workings, but there wasn't anything to do with the factory.***

It was an accident, more or less.

***It was a pre war...It would have been the lead workers trying to exploit vein material.***

I always smile when people talk about these things. When they built the A55 from Holywell, Halkyn side....but that whole section was the most expensive piece of motorway ever built anywhere. Because we'd been digging these hills since before the Romans came, 4000 BC we were digging the great Orme mines, so, you see, we've had this history where you see this bit of mountain and you just dig into it, naturally. When I was about seven, my mother's best friend, her father who was still alive, Roger, he had a black powder licence and he'd been a few years previous, he'd had a prospecting licence. He used to go onto Brynford, where the golf course is, I think there's some lead here and dog a hole and go after it and that's how a lot of locals used to live.

***So, what made the A55 so expensive?***

The whole mountain is riddled with holes and caves. When they built Rhydymwyn they wouldn't have known for sure.

***Some of the buildings actually subsided.***

***That was on the old river bed that had been filled.***

***Oh, it was a river bed was it?***

So, with regards to the effluent main, the fifteen inch main, do you know the route?

***We've been on a route march. We've walked it and checked it.***

Have you?

***I haven't, but other people have.***

***We've done where it comes out into the estuary.***

That's in Oakenholt, between Oakenholt and Connah's Quay.

***It's on the bird sanctuary, the RSPB reserve.***

You know, I spent a whole number of days wandering like a complete prune looking for that and I couldn't be definite, because there's no drawing. I've not seen a single drawing of it.

***We have got drawings. We found an old, retired person from PSA. All of the drawings tend to stop at the railway line. They all say then it goes off across the marsh to the trainfall (?) I've got an old aerial photo and if you see the line of it across the marsh and went along it with a pipe protecting tool and GPS and we surveyed it in.***

Wow.

***We also tested it and it's clear. It wasn't 15 inch all the way. It was reverse. It started off large and ended up small. When it went into the estuary .....so that it was under pressure.***

***It wasn't the obvious.***

***It was the other way round than you think. The problem was, again, when it was in use, it was pure effluent wasn't it? It was not dilutes. It wasn't treated.***

Yes, because the '41 incident, where the main, the chemical fizzed through the actual glazing of the pipe, that was the answer and I can imagine this Sam Skidmore I'm telling you about, because he used to be a Mr Fixit, he could get hold of things other people couldn't get hold of....When I got in touch with somebody in the Potteries in the middle of the War and said we want some special grade gazing for these pipes, this was done. I think Duncan Campbell picked up on it. There is actually a letter, somewhere in this lot, from the body that was running Rhydymwyn, the military bit of it, to Rhydymwyn saying what is going on.

***They ended up putting the effluent pipes in a trench, because the pipes wouldn't take the chemicals. It went through these linings. They had to replace the pipes very often.***

***The trouble was they tried mixing all sorts of things like where the decontamination plant discharged boiling water to the system, it cracked all the chemical resistant materials, it was designed for chemicals and not heat. They weren't different drainage systems. There was a bit of a surface water system locally, for roof cutters and stuff but by and large, you just had the one drainage system, designed to take toxic effluent, but it took everything else, hot water, sewage.***

Joe Lloyd said to me something that they built a soak away, by the P6 building mid way through. One thing about Duncan Campbell that's interesting is that he's got a very good analytical brain and if you mention two facts to him and he answers with different questions. He was very interested in that. At the time I could remember more about it, but I can remember Joe Lloyd telling me about it.

***Some of the buildings, like P6, had connections for roof water, roof gutters into the culvert. That was the exception rather than the rule.***

There was a big soak away, he said. I think he said it was either twenty, thirty foot.

***I think he was mentioning the actual thing the effluent went into.***

That would be the effluent pit which is up against the gate, by the railway line.

***There's nothing that I'm aware of round the P6 area.***

He said there was all different grades of gravel, in fact like a very big industrial septic tank.

***That's something I wasn't aware of.***

***It may just have been that that was the effluent pit and they were using the gravel to try and clean the stuff.***

***There were sands at the bottom of the effluent.***

***Exactly. My understanding of sands could be someone else's understanding of gravel.***

***There were other materials on the base of it.***

I always vividly remember at Castner's they used to have the two 5 or 10,000 tonne chlorine storage tanks and they were spheres. They were the first ones they had ever built, the ones at Castner's. I remember talking to somebody about them and saying what happens if the tank is punctured. "Ah, well, "they said, "normally the rain water is in the bund and goes into the drainage system, which goes into the town drainage. But, if we have a puncture, a process man has got to go and block off that drain with a metal plate, so the chlorine, which is liquid chlorine because it's under compression, so if you

puncture the side it becomes a gas. I was scratching my head about that for along, long time. I think that was just the petro-chemicals acts...

***You're back to 'There's a War on' so.....***

This is when I worked at Castner's.

***We're getting near the end of the disk now...***

[End of recording](#)