

Easington Past and Present

ND/EA

Mr. Belcher,

60 Rosedale Terrace,

Horden

13.8.1976

Mr Belcher ..... before that he (his father) came here as a single fella and my mother was at Shotton and when he got married he got the first house in Fifth Street where out ----- was born in 1910.

Interviewer – That would be old Fifth Street?

Mr Belcher – Aye, and then he shifted (moved) to Seventh Street and then my other sister was born and then we came up here and we were the first ones in Thirteenth Street. My sister was born there, she's about sixty-four now.

Interviewer – So that would be about sixty-four years since that was built?

Mr Belcher – Aye. When my father came to Horden, like, the Trust Hotel then was opened in 1911 and the next thing that was built beside the Trust, outside the Trust, were the shops and the first woman that was in there was Mrs Cutler, general dealers' shop, and then there was Marsh the cobbler. He opened the next one out and the end one was opened out by Billy Currie, the barber. The next one was Danny Waits, the butcher and Pontones. They were the five shops that were open there. The picture house was built, that would be about 1923 when they were built. The picture house was built in 1928 and then Billy Currie built a house and shop over the road, beside the picture house and he moved out, and went in there. Spowarts came in there then Pontones, they built at the top of Blackhills Terrace. There was a hairdresser, a ladies hairdresser. A billiard hall with two billiard tables in and a confectioner – sweets and that, they were selling. And then, when, as you went over the road they built a billiard hall there, with about seven tables in, just below the picture house. But then when they were built, in 1923, there was nothing that side, just gardens. There were no Aged Miners Homes or anything.

Interviewer – What was it like in Thirteenth Street?

Mr Belcher – Well, nothing ..... I can remember when I was a boy I used to sit on the steps when they were making the new road and putting the back streets in.

Interviewer – the tin school, it would be there, wouldn't it?

Mr Belcher – The tin school was built about 1913, before the 1914-18 war. I think it was built before the war, the tin school, and there was nothing else up there but gardens. That was all there was up there. Where we're sitting now, this was

Ellison's field, here, there used to be a well it was built in a gantry and a wheel on to get the water out, just about where we are sitting now.

Interviewer – And who used that then?

Mr Belcher – Why, the farmer used to use it.

Interviewer – And that was Ellison's Farm at the top then?

Mr Belcher – Ellison's Farm at the top. South Terrace there, used to be trees there, where the garage was.

Interviewer – Blackhills Terrace?

Mr Belcher – Blackhills Terrace, there used to be trees there. There was very little at the top end here, where Thirteenth Street was, see, there was the Catholic Church, why, it was built, I can remember, when that was built up there. There was nothing the top, they generally get on arguing about the shops you know, those that were here first, but Hudson built them.

Interviewer – Hudson the builder?

Mr Belcher – Hudson the builder, he built them, he came here with a steam wagon, I think it was the first one I ever saw. It was all horses and carts then.

Interviewer – And that was a steam engine?

Mr Belcher – Mmm, it came in, and I was only a boy then – about nine. I remember we gave him a hand to hoy (throw) the bricks off and he gave us a ride down to the Empress and back.

Interviewer – That was the reward?

Mr Belcher – That's what we got.

Interviewer – You'll have seen a lot of changes in Horden?

Mr Belcher – Oh yes, without a doubt. Why, I started here as a boy, and I've been in the pits now for 47 years at Horden. It was in 1929 when I started.

Interviewer – But you've seen a lot of changes?

Mr Belcher – Oh aye, there've been a lot.

Interviewer – Regarding the back of the picture house, people used to live up there, I presume.

Mr Belcher – Well, there was a canny few families used to live up there. There was Seeds, there was Harry Jarvis, the Chairman of the Lodge. There was a canny few families and people were born up there in the gardens.

Interviewer – What actually did they live in?

Mr Belcher – Well, they had to live in there see, they got put out, they got put out – Billy Burnett, he got put out, I was going to school when he got out in Ninth Street.

Interviewer – Why did he get put out?

Mr Belcher – Well, if he said anything, he got his notice at the pit – just chucked (threw) him out.

Interviewer – Were there any unions at that time?

Mr Belcher – Why, the unions couldn't do anything about it, see. That was an agreement. If you got your notice at the pit, you had to get out of your house. And they used to put you out, mind, they used to put you out.

Interviewer – Evict you?

Mr Belcher – Yes, put you out in the street whether it was raining or snowing. There was a canny few loved up there, Jimmy Waugh, he lived in a caravan and a fella called Steel, big Tom Smith.

Interviewer – And what actually was the accommodation up in the gardens?

Mr Belcher – Why, just a cree (cabin), an ordinary cree.

Interviewer – To cover them?

Mr Belcher – Yeah, that was what it was, an ordinary cree. Why they built the Council houses at the crossroads, to get them out, it was that much of a disgrace. They had to build them along there, to get them out. There were children born at the back of there. There was pigeons and hens.

Interviewer – How did they go in those days, for sanitary then?

Mr Belcher – Well, that's the way it was. Well, you get on about that, I mean to say at the back of the club in Fifth Street, there were only six lavatories for the whole street and one tap. A lion's head, it used to be, used to be a lion's head. I used to come back from school and just turn the handle for a drink, and get a drink out of it, coming on my way home when I'd just started school.

Interviewer – So there were sanitary arrangements at all behind the picture house?

Mr Belcher – No, they had nothing, nothing. And there were no taps, so you had to carry the water up.

Interviewer – And the pigeon square, was it there at the time?

Mr Belcher – The pigeon square was just opposite the ..... beside the tin school. And then it shifted (moved) from there round Ellison's Bank and it shifted from there into the middle of the gardens. That's further up, where Hudson and his stables are round there. There was Hudson and Stoddarts. And Viv Callan had a little horse, but Hudson, he had the most, he had the most contracts, like.

Interviewer – That was the building contractor?

Mr Belcher – Aye, Hudson, he had a big place up there, Crooks and they had some up there.

Interviewer – So you would say he was the first you remember up at this top end of Horden with the horses and carts?

Mr Belcher – Hudson, well in Warren Street there was a fella in there that had Cockburn's shop, before Cockburn, it was a fella, it was a second-hand shop. You call him ----- and he had one horse, one, but when it got yoked, it stopped yoked until he got the contact finished because it used to take about three days to get it yoked.

Interviewer – And that was Cockburn the grocer was it?

Mr Belcher – No, the fella that was in before Cockburn.

Interviewer – You don't know his name, then?

Mr Belcher – Downey, I think they called him. But I cannot remember him, I can just remember Cockburn in all the time I was going down, but I can remember my father going on about him.

Interviewer – And the prices of things, then, in those days.....

Mr Belcher – Well, they were dear, because there was nobody who had any money to buy anything, you see. Everybody was over the moon at the weekend if you got sixpence on a coupon (football coupon), he was flying, and I was putting with one chap once, and he got on about getting married, I was putting with this chap, and he had a wife and three kids and eighteen shilling to take home and he got on about Christmas cakes and presents and he says "That's what I have got to take home".

Interviewer – Christmas and what?

Mr Belcher – Why you know, buying present at Christmas, for the children. Why, he had eighteen shillings to spend. There was no money then.

Interviewer – And the people, the neighbours?

Mr Belcher – Why, they were more friendly, because they had nothing and that was the only ..... if anyone died, I mean to say ..... in Horden, everybody used to, you know, come to the funeral and that. The whole street used to put the blinds down for them

Interviewer – That was respect?

Mr Belcher – That was respect, but it's all finished now, that. See, a man can die next door and he can be buried, and you'll not know anything about it. See, it was religion then. There were more people, more young girls and boys going to church then.

Interviewer – And did all your family go to church then?

Mr Belcher – Oh, you had to. That was it, that was the discipline.

Interviewer – Yes, the discipline then regarding your parents.

Mr Belcher – You had to go. If you got told to go, you had to go then. There was no back answering, or anything like that.

Interviewer – And they noticed if you didn't?

Mr Belcher – Oh, yes without a doubt. You never saw anybody back answering to his mother and father then. That was it. When you sat down at the table, you couldn't say "I don't want it", the only that you said was "is there anymore"? It was just like Dick Wittington and Oliver Twist. If it got put down you had to eat it, it was not good saying you didn't want it. There was no "I want this, and I want that," you didn't get that.

Interviewer – What did you do the rest of the week, then?

Mr Belcher – Well, you used to stand at the corner end. Then there was a club and you used to go in there and watch people playing billiards, because you were rarely, you very rarely had any money. You were working hard, if you were making any money, you know, you had to be lucky. Young lads were starting to putt, and they got sick of it, and it was a rough racket, some left, a canny few joined up to get out of it. That's why I believe in discipline. Everybody should have gone into the forces for a couple of years.

Interviewer – So you still think conscription should have been kept in?

Mr Belcher – Conscription should have been kept on.

Interviewer – And that would have stamped out all the vandalism today?

Mr Belcher – It would have got me out of the pit, I would have got out and I wouldn't have went back. I would have got out, if I had getting two year. When the country comes to trouble, you've trained them. There's young lads, like my own brother, he was going to school when it started, and it broke out, and he had to go when he was eighteen, he had to go to the pit, and he joined up. He joined the Navy. He had to go down the pit and he got fined two pounds for not going down the pit?

Interviewer – How did he get fined two pound for not going down the pit?

Mr Belcher – Why he had to go down, because his father was a miner, and they said, "His father is a miner and he had a right to go down" and he said he wasn't going down. They asked him what he was going to do, and he said he'd joined the Navy and he still got fined two pounds for it. He was in the Navy when he was eighteen.

Interviewer – Who fined him two pounds?

Mr Belcher – Castle Eden magistrates.

Interviewer did he go to court?

Mr Belcher – Yes, when I was going to school, when I was fourteen in 1928 – I was fourteen in October, I didn't go to school, I got a job at Tommy Simpson's farm. It was five shilling a week leading the cart in. My father got a summons for me not going to school because I had no boots, and he went to Castle Eden court, when he

got there, he saw the clerk of the court and he told him the reason why, and he showed him his note (pay note). Now, when the case came in, the clerk of the court gave Colonel Burdon – he was on the bench, a note and Colonel looked at it and he said, “Mr Belcher, I think you should be able to buy a pair of boots out of this”. But the clerk of the court told Colonel Burdon that the note was for six men, not one, and the case was dismissed, and I went back to school the last week. Colonel Burdon thought it was for six men.

Interviewer – And the note was actually for six men.

Mr Belcher – Six men, six coal hewers, and they used to share it out.

Interviewer – But Colonel Burdon thought it was only for the one man?

Mr Belcher – Colonel Burdon thought it was for one. So, there he was talking about making money before the war. They get on about this and that and the price of stuff now, but everybody's better off now, what you getting you have to spend it. See, you cannot save anything, you spend it if it's only the right way. But your's better off now, I've seen six coal hewers work hard mind, good men, and go down to the office and begging, they got 18d a piece, maybe's a pound to distribute among the six of them. They were the good old days those.

Interviewer – That was like a bonus?

Mr Belcher – Aye. Why it was, you know, they used to give them it. Like a what you call an advance note, you were lucky if you were making ten shillings a day down the pit. It was a big wage that. See a score for wagon way men and such as that, see. A Deputy got nothing. He got very little and horse keepers.

Interviewer – And the unions couldn't do anything about it at that time?

Mr Belcher – Well. They didn't ..... I mean to say when I went to school, I was taught that there was 20 in a score, but when I went to the pit there was 21, they let that go you see. They used to talk about free coal, it was not free coal, everybody was, there was something kept off his note, so much percent. If a man had three or four sons working at the colliery he was paying for his coal. He thought he was getting free coal, but he wasn't.

Interviewer – When did the system change?

Mr Belcher – Why, it seems as though we had nobody to stick up for you. If a man speaks the truth and you ask what he thinks in his opinion, he's classed as a communist, see. See, that's the way I look at it.

Interviewer – And this was under private enterprise?

Mr Belcher – Private enterprise.

Interviewer – So therefore the best thing that ever happened was nationalisation?

Mr Belcher – Nationalisation, there was no two ways about it or else you would never have got a rise. But I've seen some hard cases at the pit. I've seen young lads about with no boots on and such as that. They stand in a queue mind. Plenty of

food in the country and I've stood in the queue for something to eat, I used to get a bun on a morning and a cup of cocoa and at dinner time, for my dinner, it was tatty (potato) and mincemeat and that was the last meal and I was growing.

Interviewer – When was this?

Mr Belcher – Well, during the strike, 1926 and 1921 was the same way. See, that was it. See, it makes you think, that. See, there's a lot of these young lads now, you know, when you tell them about it, they don't believe you, they think that you are just coddling (joking) them on, but it was rough then. I've seen people come into Horden and shift out a fortnight after, if they could get a horse to pull them out, because there was only one way in, that was Ellison's bank, and it took a good horse to pull an empty cart out, never mind anything else. Hudson used to have the job to fetch them in. It was all horses and carts then. The coals that they used to get off the colliery used to come with horse and carts.

Interviewer – And washing days, etc.,?

Mr Belcher – Well, we used to wait for rain water because the water was very soft water, you know, they used to get at that, but there was none of those soap powders or anything like that then,

Interviewer – No detergents?

Mr Belcher – It used to what came down here, the rainwater, and it was boiled until it was clean, boiled clean, that the only thing you got, you used to buy soap then, it was a bar. It used to be about a foot, a yard long and used to get the chopping axe out and chop a lump off and that the way the washing went. Many a time you used to get a wash in the tub after my mother washed the clothes. You used to get in and get a wash. There were no baths in the houses. Very few had baths then, I think South Terrace, the top three had, but the colliery men used to use the baths. Men used to get baths at the pit, that was the finest thing, pit baths, pithead baths.

Interviewer – Private houses would use the old tin bath.

Mr Belcher – The old tin bath.

Interviewer – It would be very awkward for you, with sisters and that?

Mr Belcher – Why, I mean to say, it wasn't that. It might be about five in one shift and you had to wait for your turn to get washed.

Interviewer – And was its different water, or the same water?

Mr Belcher – It just depends, if there wasn't plenty of water to go round, that was it.

Interviewer – But it would be very awkward with your sisters?

Mr Belcher – Oh, they got washed different, you know, when we were not in.

Interviewer – And they'd be out when you got washed.

Mr Belcher – Oh, we knew that. You hadn't to be told anything. In those days, it I was walking down the street with my mother going to do any shopping, she stopped,

going down the street, then she got on talking to a woman, I wasn't allowed to stand there, I knew that. There was something came on the top of my head, I walked further on, about 200 yards, and then waited for my mother.

Interviewer – So you couldn't listen in?

Mr Belcher – Oh no, you weren't allowed to listen in, you were brought up the right way then.

Interviewer – And looking back, do you think they were better off being brought up that way than what they are today?

Mr Belcher – Yes, I believe in it, I believe in discipline. I believe in it, there's one thing I don't like to see is if I'm standing for a bus or sitting in a bus and the mothers saying to their child, "come here" and "I'm not, I'm not", you know. I've seen where I've worked, down the pit where there's been a father and two sons, big sons, bigger than their father and they've been you know, couldn't agree with another chap or something like that and they're starting a fight and their just said "That'll do" and they have sat down, if you hit your father, mind, in those days, other people would tune on you, you see, you were glad to get out.

Interviewer – And when there was a fight in the pub, they fought different then.

Mr Belcher – The father ..... aye, there used to be any amount of fights but, why, I mean to say, in those days it was sport. If you turned up on a Sunday morning and you hadn't a black eye, they used to say, "Were you not out last night?" because you hadn't a black eye, like a buttonhole. The trust then when it was built, the never use to clean the windows. They used to be knocker out on a Saturday night and new ones put in on a Monday. Brand new, they used to. .... In those days, if a man was drunk, through the week, you know, you see the man come up you'd say "Why, where's he get the money?". Nobody had anything. There was this lad, the vicarage had been broken into, there was some money missing and this lad turned out and he had a new suit on and the police saw him, and they took him down to the Police Station wanting to know where he had got the money to buy the suit, because the vicarage had been broken into. So, that was those days. Everybody had very little then. They were hard times in those days. I've seen lads, they've tried to buy the houses, these scheme houses, the ten shillings used to come off that note, doesn't matter what he had. He might have with him his 30/- at the top but that ten shilling came off mind.

Interviewer – And who did you buy them through?

Mr. Belcher – Why, got them through the colliery, you got it (rent) kept off your note, see. That was the only way they'd get the money, why, they couldn't keep it up some of them, some of them gave their homes up. They used to go and live in a room. Rent a room off somebody and live in it. Couldn't afford it. The main thing is, what I reckon, you used to get five shillings rent off the colliery house, but that five shillings never went up. It's still five shillings today and that's sixty years since that.

Interviewer – And the schools, which school did you go to?



Mr Belcher – Well, I started at the infants. But I've lost one or two memories about that, about when the school was built. People about 70 years old and that and over 70, some of the old ones, they cannot remember. These schools must have been built when the colliery, just before the colliery opened, the church hall was opened there. That was the thing round about there. But these schools have been up a long time. I went to school there and I finished there. I started there and there used to be fifty-six in the classroom.

Interviewer – To one teacher?

Mr Belcher – One teacher, and if there was one teacher off there used to be a partition, and they used to pull it by, and they had 120 a bigger gate (attendance) than Hartlepool. They talk about education, it just starts when you leave school. Now how could a teacher look after you? Sometimes he didn't know that you were there. There were fifty-six in our classroom. Some teachers couldn't manage. It was a bit rough for them in those days.

Interviewer – And Sports?

Mr Belcher – Well, I've seen boys come out of the pit and they've worked a hard shift and then they've been .... they used to fight to play football and they get on now about football being slavery. I've seen lads coming out of the pit here and worked a hard shift and fight and play. But that's all there was then, football, quoit playing, handball, you see, it was a sport, you had to pay nothing. That was the only sport. There was foot-running, everybody used to try the foot-running. That was the only sport there was. See, you couldn't go to the pictures, you might get to the pictures with your pocket money, if you had any. It was only 2d and 3d then. When we went to school we used to go to the Deluxe (Picture Hall) we used to go in there on a Saturday and if you went to the pictures then, you used to get a free ticket for Tuesday see. That was your week, you were waiting for it coming. Then the Saturday or Sunday night, if you had a treat for the pictures why, that was your day out. You looked forward to it. Durham Big Meeting that was only a 10d return, but you had to save the pennies to get to Durham Big Meeting. It was a big day out, that. We used to be talking about it before it came, and the carnival, when the carnival was on. That was out day out, that.

Interviewer – That was a yearly event?

Mr Belcher – Mmm. There were no holidays. You got no holidays. The only holidays you got was maybe Easter. And everybody used to try to ..... your mother used to try and make a hat or something new for Easter and that was it. That was your day out then. The good old days they were, the good old days.

Interviewer – And down the beach, did you go down there?

Mr Belcher – The best beach I've seen. It was the best beach in England that. You used to go down, there used to be horses and carts down, shows down and there used to be..... we all used to go down, when we went to school and we used to get three cakes in a bag, and there was an old woman, or two old women and they used to stamp your hand with a stamper. Why, what we used to do, eat those cakes, lick

the stamp off and go back, But, it was a lovely beach you know. There was a big pond, in the dene there, where the viaduct is, there were one or two shows there and then the sand, it used to be bit white rocks and then sand and we used to light fires with wood that had been washed up and candles. A lot of candles used to get washed up – there was no coal then. Then Blackhall started to tip, Blackhall was the first tip in there, mind when that went in, we were all over the moon, we didn't know what was going to happen and then Horden started and then Easington and then that stopped it. They used to come from all over mind. Shotton and all over, going down to Horden beach.

Interviewer – On Chapel trips?

Mr Belcher – One of the bonniest walks it was. That was the only way you got there. At first, you used to go up Ellison's Bank then. But you had to get out of the car then, Whites had it and walk up the bank to get in again at the top. See it couldn't pull you up, it was that heavy. Horden beach was the first beach. If that had been down London or down the South they would never have let them tip and coal in, and that's what spoilt it and Blackhall was the first to tip it in. Spoilt it, spoilt the beach. They wouldn't let them build any factories up here, see. They knew that a lot of them would leave the pit. But there were any amounts of lads that joined up. I knew two or three lads, they went to London and they got off the train with 2d in their pockets, but they stopped, rather than go down the pit, if you joined up, your mother and father used to say you were lazy. They used to say you were lazy if you joined up. But it was a rough racket. But it was a poor life – I'm pleased I've got no ....., if I had any sons, they wouldn't have gone down there. That's the last place in my mind, that, when you get a look around. You're sitting there eating your bit bait that you take in there amongst the muck and water and the smell. Well, I didn't expect getting as old as what I did. They were killing then right and left, at the pit then. They used to fetch them up on two wheels and just knock on the door and say, "There's your man, Mrs". They were killing them about two a week then, at Horden Colliery. Canny few. There were two or three young lads got killed. There was two who used to work with me. There was Billy Waugh, a nice lad, he got married and he was a Salvation Army man, and he got killed in a fortnight. There was any amount of young lads got killed. It got that he was a desperate, a man wouldn't go down the pit if he had nay money. If he had a shilling, he'd spend that shilling before he went. He was just like the cowboy, he wouldn't go down the pit, unless he was broken. Well, I've seen some tough times.

Interviewer – And the characters in Horden then?

Mr Belcher – Oh, there were some queer men, you know, why there were some men who come out of the 1914 war, that had had a canny rough time and they didn't care less, see and that's when they started to fight, you know, for better conditions and that, see. People get sick, like. Why, my father, he went into the army and there were three cousins and there was only my father came out, the 1914 war. They were on the brass plate there, at the Church yard the names. Half of Horden got wiped out. That's toughened men up, you know. They came back, when they'd been in the trenches, came back here.

Interviewer – That gave them the will to fight for better condition?

Mr Belcher – Why, it certainly did. They were that sick. See, they'd lost everything. They lost their brothers and one thing and another.

Interviewer – Can you remember the personalities in Horden at that time, the funny chaps?

Mr Belcher – Oh well, there's one or two lads you know, what looked for trouble like and they used to get a bad name and that then, if they got a couple of pints you know, and go off and why, he had a good right, you know, and getting loose, he used to get a couple of pints at the weekend and away, fighting right and left and one thing and another. But, there was only one lad, you know whatever, thought about welfare for young lads, and that was Harry Hawke. He had the gym and that lad, he used to put his pocket money away, we used to promise to pay him 6d a week, if you could. Well, he couldn't get it, you know, because you never got it. You used to give him 1/6d to join, but after that, he got nothing after that. He used to have the gym in the North Eastern Hotel, and then they first on that got opened in the Trust was a lovely place, he had a rough time. There was the managers, he was a manager, he came here, and he had a son, why, he was interested in rugby and he got it and Reggie Ritson and them who lived in out street, Thirteenth Street. The two stables that were in the Trust there, where the betting shop is, why, they knocked the two stables out and they made two showers in there, it was a lovely place, that was. Just to get washed like, after the match. Oh, they had a rough time, they could get a ..... you know, they tried to get a field, couldn't get a field, nobody interested in the lads, I'd take my cap off to Harry Hawke. He used to be interested in boxing and that. There were some good lads in Horden, boxing. There was young Abbott, he beat Bunter – Bunter who was champion at Hartlepool.

Interviewer – George Bunter?

Mr Belcher – Yes. There was young Routledge and then a lot of boys used to go in for this, you know, weight lifting and such as that. Why, Ronnie Johnson, he was the same age as me and he went down there. Walter Priestly and them, Skipper Robinson and them. Well, he went in for that sport, but that's all you had to do, see, you had no money, if you were going dancing and that. The young girls, if you went to the dance, you know, we were lucky to get there. There was no paint and powder then, for girls. You see if they put it on, their mothers used to say, "There's only clowns put that on!". And the union card, they used to be red, they used to rub their cheeks with the union card. You used to get away to the dance for 6d. It was a rough time, then. Aye.....Horden ..... but I wouldn't like to live my life over again, I wouldn't I started putting when I was seventeen, just turned seventeen some lads didn't like it, but I tried everything, you know. But if I'd go out, I wouldn't have gone back. My first day down and I was sitting in the dark down the pit, I said, "When I go home I'll come back here no more", but I'm still there. About eight year, I'm there, I expect to get finished this Christmas.

Interviewer – How old are you now?

Mr Belcher – I'll be 62 in October. I was born in Thirteenth Street.

Interviewer – So you'll get an early retirement?

Mr Belcher – Aye, I expect so. That's what they're fighting for. Expecting to get them finished at sixty.

Interviewer – Have you had any trouble with the dust, or ....?

Mr Belcher – No, I've been lucky. I've had one or two accidents like, you know, tub on my foot, plasters on and bett hand, I had a bett hand and I wanted no more. And I wouldn't like anybody to have one.

Interviewer – With the shovel, Tom?

Mr Belcher – The shovel. It went up just like a football – my hand. But I was lucky like, the people that were getting killed at the pit, at the time, you were lucky. Then, there was no ambulance then. They used to stop the train coming through Horden. Dawson, who got his fingers chopped of. It was two days before they got him to Sunderland. They had to go and catch a horse, they had to get that horse and catch it in the field, and he yoked it up and, in the trap, and he took his through the trap to Sunderland.

Interviewer – Was the cottage hospital not built then?

Mr Belcher – The cottage hospital was there, but his fingers were chopped off>

Interviewer – And they couldn't deal with it?

Mr Belcher – Dawson, he lived in Eleventh Street, they had to get the horse and trap and get him there. There was no cars then, a man was lucky if he had a car, I think there was only one I can remember, when I was a boy, Bertie Mounter's father had one. Ringtons Tea used to have a horse and cart. He used to stop at the Trust. He fetched a ..... I can remember when he fetched the first van. It was driven by a chain, a chain on the sprocket at the back. That's the way it came, mind, solid tyres, a nice little van, mind, to look at, chain driven.

Interviewer – Hard time eh?

Mr Belcher – There were no two ways about it.

Interviewer – But your family kept together though Tommy?

Mr Belcher – Why, you see, that's what keeps them together. See, if you've got nothing, you try and help one another. That's where a chap gets into trouble like, and he, if he gets a father why, he got everything, you know what I mean. There's any amount of young lads, they were good players they wouldn't play, I knew some girls and boys who had passed to go to Henry Smiths and they couldn't go because they had no clothes, see. I've seen lads working at the pit, they have shaken their clothes and put them on to turn out. They had no clothes, see. And that's the way you were. You got learnt nothing at school, mine. Very little at school. There were 56 to a class, he couldn't look after 56. It was a rough time, you were there, and you had to be kept down, and my belief was this and it was proof of the pudding, the miner was keeping the country, he was keeping the country mind and it proved it. When a

miner went on strike the electric went off, the gas board started to shout, the coke the steel see, it stopped all them. He knew, if he gave the miners a rise, everything would have to go. See, even your bus fares, your petrol, it went up, see, they had to. When I used to go down to Hartlepool, before the war, I used to get told that a miner, he wouldn't be wanted because oil would be that cheap you see, when the Yankie went in, and us we're drilling for this oil in the East. Well, these Arabs were witty men. He never did anything, he just sat back smoking a pipe. Why we went in and drilled down and found oil, see. It I was sitting looking out of the window and I saw somebody digging a well, in my garden, I wouldn't stop him, I'd let him find the water, and I'd gout and say you're in the wrong place. That's what the Arabs did with us, he chucked us out, grabbed the oil well, see. Now, he put the oil up, see, put the oil up, see. It was the Arabs that got the miners a rise. If he could have got his oil up for nothing, the miner wouldn't get a penny. We thought he wanted to get a barrel of oil, for a shilling. But Arabs just sat back and let him find it, and when he got it – it's his. The Suez Canal was the same way, we built it on one condition, in 99 year, the Arabs claimed it, see. Well, it was a long time that and we thought 99 year wouldn't go over – oh, but it did, and that was the Suez Canal gone.

Interviewer – And the lease was up then?

Mr Belcher – The lease was up. See, this Arab, he had a desert, he would rule the world, he was buying half of England. They wanted us to sell them Nelson's Column, they were saying, he's buying any amount of stuff. There's one there bought an hotel, he never worked for it, he just sat back. See, they get on about men making money, it's the same in England. There's people there, look in the buffet end, these shares and stocks. They're buying ships at sea with the stuff on, they're not doing anything, just sitting and there's the working man, he had to, and a poor miner, why, tax, he cannot get away with the tax. And the man who thought about that, mind, he was a witty man "Pay as you earn", why because if a miner had owed him £300, he wouldn't have got it off the miner, he couldn't put him jail, because the jails aren't big enough now. He might get him into hospital now. Well, of course, they're queuing up to get into jail now. They're studying and such as that. You might get into hospital sharper (quicker). But you cannot get into jail, because there are some in jail who'll not come out. It's changed right round, the world in my opinion. But it's changed for the better. I think everybody like the working class is better off today than they have been in their lives. See, there's that much money in my opinion, spent on battle ships and armies – armies, what we have out in foreign countries, and the tax man was paying for that – the working man was keeping them. You see, we had about 130,000 in Hong-Kong and then we had people, employed for the, keeping them and maybe about 50,000 looking after them. Then we had them in India. When I went to school there was a big map of the world there and all that in red is ours, that was India see. Australia and all round, America, it was in red once, but now it's all gone that. And all those little battle ships, we had and there's two admirals want to resign just lately, Wilson, and don't you know how many are getting paid? The miner has to work till he's sixty-five, but a man in the forces, he does nothing. You have to pay them off, because he puts a belly on and a double chin, he cannot bend down, why, he cannot do anything when he's about 40, well,

you pay him off, the same as the police force, see, he gets that big, why he cannot bend down, why you have to pension him off. That's what gets me beat. You see, in the army he does twenty year and then he gets a pension, in the forces he gets twenty year and then he gets pension, but a miner, he's producing and he's keeping the lot. There in Germany, he finished at fifty. Before that, he's taken off the work where the hard work is, and he's put back and he still gets the same wage, see, now, when I get down to Hartlepool, them docks now, I cannot get a job in the docks, it's a family affair there.

Interviewer – Closed shop

Mr Belcher – Closed shop. Such as Rolls Royce. You cannot get in, see, it's a closed shop there.

Interviewer – And what about when the Bevan Boys came in?

Mr Belcher – Well, that was the finest thing in the world for the miner – let them see. And there were some nice lads came to the pit. There were two or three and the miners said when it was finished, they were straight, packed up.

Interviewer – None of them stayed?

Mr Belcher – No..... well, two or three. There were two or three. There was one, came from the Channel Islands. He was building greenhouses, now, he told me, he says, "As soon as this is finished, I'm out of here". And I used to talk to him, like, he used to build a greenhouse so that the water was running down the middle of the glass, and he had me beat. I said "Why, do you put a tilt on like that?" He says, "No", and I ask him, and he showed me how to, you know, to get water to run down the middle of the glass, because the greenhouse, the life in a greenhouse is the sashing, when that goes. See but they used to make it, so the water, when it hits the glass, it used to run down the middle, see. And then there was another one, a bank lad. Nice lads to talk to. Mid, they would work, but they packed up. But it's getting worse now, the pit. See, we have to go underneath, we're in the sea, now, and the water's just coming into your clothes, and damp and such as that. They're worse conditions now, mind, that what they were before. Dampness, and young lads there, they're getting some money, they're stopping into weekends, but you can see them, their faces, you know, it's cutting their lives short.

Take this machinery out, mind, you're finished, you wouldn't get any coal; out. It's marvellous but you see where the trouble is, there are too many bosses, see. There are too many bosses now. It's top heavy with bosses. And the young lads are taking these jobs when they should be doing some work, but they're not. Now, electricians and fitters are bosses at the colliery now. When I started at the pit, you never a fitter down the pit, unless, you know, very rarely you saw a fitter or an electrician, but now there are a lot of them and they're all getting their tickets and they'll not do this and they're not going to do that. Now that's starting down the pits now, "I'm not carrying that in." and that's it see. Now, they're all making any amount of money. They're in at the weekend making any amount of money. They've got their tickets, but they cannot do their job, see.

Interviewer – Because there are not enough vacancies?

Mr Belcher – No, if they come into a job and they see it, electricity leave some good stuff in, but I've seen two or three of them come in, they've got their tickets, but they cannot fettle it, they cannot mend it. They'll say you want a new one. Noe that might cost maybe £120 or £250 off, put it on the bottom and it stops there.

Interviewer – They've got the theory, but they haven't got the practical experience.

Mr Belcher – They haven't got the practical, it the practical you want. There's the managers when I started there, there was 6000 men employed at Horden colliery. There was one manager, two under managers, then there was about five officials to each seam. Now there's two managers, there's not 2000 men here no, there's two managers, eleven under managers and officials. There's one boss for every two men now.

Interviewer – And in social like the officials mix with and accept the miner now.

Mr. Belcher – Well, they do, but when they go away for these refreshers, that's been pumped into them. Don't get in with the men you're working with, you know what I mean. Don't you know, keep away, don't get over familiar with the working class. Well I'm over the moon that way, I don't want anything to do with him. Because they come in and they say "Well, right, why me, I mean to say, I do all the repair jobs you know. Just any heavy falls or new pans on, or any extensions, why these came in and they say, we want this doing". I just turn round and say "Which way do you want it?" why, they walk away. See, they couldn't care less, see that's it. But the trouble is, you see, some lads will be on one job, that's all wrong see. They'd send him on another job, he's beat. But if you get right round like and go onto different jobs and doing them, see, you got used to it. Why, they sent this new equipment in like, there are different things on you see, they put more things on, see you know. But, when you try to make a machine where a fellow could work it, where a fellow supposing he couldn't read or write see, I've seen some good lads at that. But there's sometimes about five or six labourers on, one of these big cutters. Why, sometimes they would get on with them and rather show the lad, they wouldn't show them, see. He'd pull these things off and "This is turn right and this is for there", the jib and that, why, they'd tear them up. So, he'd be a key man see. See, why, there's only him can do it. But there's no machine that goes down the pit mind where a man has to go to college, or go to night schools, to use it. They're simple machines, see. But some lads will not show you. Why me, I showed the young lads, I make them do it, see. Two of the young lads come in "Oh, I don't know," I say "Well, come here," get hold of that handle to make them do it, because I can be finished. But, its top heavy. I mean to say, it's happening all over. National Security, it's the same way. See, there's lads getting this. I was talking to one man who was dishing it out. He says, "Why that's only one man", but if he stops dishing it out they'll say, "Here's a man here doing nothing", so they'll sack him, see. That's the way it's going. If he doesn't dish it out they'll finish him. Why, there's any amount playing game in (taking advantage).

Interviewer – Imposing on them?

Mr Belcher – Why aye, what it came out for was this: it was a good thing, but the working man, he cut the sucker off that's feeding him, see. They gave him it – a different man who was maybe's buying his house or something like that and he was working at the pit out of fettle (not too well), why, there's any amount of men who would go, when they shouldn't go and what they try to do was give them as much so you'd not get into debt and keep them going.

Interviewer – They abused it.

Mr Belcher – Abused it ..... straight away.

Interviewer – Well, there's greed in all walks of life.

Mr. Belcher – Oh, that's it, one to stop the other.