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"Scrap-Heap Stories": Oral Narratives of Labour and Loss in Scottish Mining and Manufacturing

Arthur McIvor

Introduction

I witnessed in his later life my father's deterioration from proud industrial worker and stable breadwinner (he was a father to four kids) to redundancy and poorly paid, precarious, degraded work. Arthur McIvor (snr) had held a steady job almost all of his working life (for 32 years) on the assembly line in a car factory until being made redundant at age 54 as the company downsized in 1980. Thereafter his body was drained in work that was beyond his physical capacity (in a small, old-fashioned dirty steelworks). His deeply engrained work ethic, shaped by wartime service in the Royal Navy, would not countenance premature retirement. He ended up diminished and stigmatised (in his eyes at least) as a factory cleaner, sweeping floors. But at least he had a job. He found some consolation in booze; there was rarely a time when the Bell's whisky bottle was far from his reach near his favourite armchair in these last years of his life. His degeneration was heart-breaking. My Dad died in 1992 and his life is one I've been struggling to make sense of ever since. He shared the fate of millions of industrial workers in the UK and elsewhere facing structural economic change as factories, mines, steel mills, ports and shipyards downsized and closed. They were thrown, as often said, on the "scrap heap". What was the meaning of such industrial work and its subsequent loss to such men as my father? How did they make sense of all this themselves, through relating their own life stories and narrating the lived experience of this profound rupture in their lives?

This article is an attempt to understand this process through listening to the voices of workers like my father and reflecting on their ways of telling, whilst making some observations on how an oral history methodology can add to our understanding. It draws upon a rich bounty of oral history projects and collections undertaken in Scotland over recent decades, including interviews oral historian Ian MacDougall did for the Scottish Working People's History Trust. At the Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC) we have also been collecting and archiving oral interviews since 1995 and have a series of collections on working lives and a growing number of projects relating to deindustrialisation, including a number of outstanding student projects (Clark 2013, 2017; Ferns 2019; Stride 2017). Other sets of archived and extant interviews include excellent sources for the county of Ayrshire, including those undertaken on the Johnnie Walker

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plant closure in Kilmarnock in 2011 and the University of West Scotland collection on deindustrialisation in Kilmarnock and Cumnock.[1]

Scotland's Deindustrialisation

Deindustrialisation has dominated the cultural landscape of Scotland since the 1970s and has been the focus of considerable academic study. Important work has examined the economics of industrial decline, the impact of deindustrialisation and plant closures on communities and the extraordinary lengths that Scottish workers went to protest against and resist job losses and the attack on their livelihoods (see, for example, Foster/Woolfson 1986; Phillips 2012, 2017; Perchard 2013, 2017; Clark 2013, 2017; McIvor 2017). Much of this work draws upon oral history interview methodologies with those directly affected, some very extensively. Many of us have also been influenced by path-breaking work on the social and cultural impacts of deindustrialisation in North America, including the inspirational work of Steven High and Alessandro Portelli, to whom we owe a great debt (cf. High 2003; Portelli 2011; Linkon/Russo 2003; K'Meyer/Hart 2009; Walley 2013; Strangleman/Rhodes/Linkon 2013).

Scotland was an archetypal "industrial nation" built on coal, textiles, chemicals and the heavy industries of steel, engineering and shipbuilding. At mid-twentieth century the economy was still dominated by industry and such blue-collar jobs were heavily concentrated in west-central Scotland, in the Clydeside industrial conurbation centred around the port city of Glasgow. From the 1950s the country experienced a particularly rapid and steep rate of deindustrialisation, which accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s recession under the neo-liberal onslaught of Thatcherism where so-called "lame duck" industries were left to the savage vagaries of the market. In Glasgow, industrial jobs as a share of total employment fell from 50 percent in 1951 to just 19 percent in 1991 (Phillips 2017: 316 f.). As elsewhere, deindustrialisation was an uneven and complex process – associated with full plant closures and large-scale job losses, but also persistent and progressive downsizing and company restructuring, with the concomitant rising levels of work intensification, job insecurity and worker disempowerment that went along with mass unemployment and under-employment. There was a shifting in response to market pressures towards lower cost, more flexible labour and a concerted managerial offensive – bolstered by the resurgence of neo-liberal ideologies – to increase workloads, attack trade unions and undermine the labour contract. These processes adversely affected Scottish workers' health and well-being in complex ways, adding another dimension to a pre-existing poor health record linked to high levels of overcrowding, poverty, deprivation and poor standards of occupational health and safety (for more detail see McIvor 2017: 25 ff.; McIvor 2014). As social researchers Mackenzie and colleagues recently remarked: "Scotland […] now has the worst mortality outcomes, and the widest health inequalities, in Western Europe" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 4; see also Walsh/Taulbut/Hanlon 2009).

1 I am grateful to all narrators for telling their stories and to interviewers for permission to use this material and for depositing and archiving interviews with the SOHC (see bibliography for full details).

Narrating Industrial Lives and Job Loss in Scotland

Turning then to the oral testimonies: Workers involved in downsizing and plant closures in Scotland narrated their lived experiences in many ways as they struggled to interpret and make sense of their working lives and draw meaning from it. Industrial work was central to the lives of most men and many women in the post-1945 generation and a source of pride, dignity and identity (McIvor 2013). To lose such work was traumatic and closure could be met with shock and disbelief. Ex-steel worker Martin Kerr said "I never saw so many men cry at the demolition of the Ravenscraig plant [Scotland's largest steelworks] in 1996" (Kacieja 2013: 17). Margaret Cullen described Springburn in its heyday in the 1950s when she had her first job at the local cooperative store:

> *You would see the men comin oot, oot the factories, Cowlairs Works and eh one or two different works. And they used to come up three deep coming up Springburn Road ... when they heard the horn, aw the men coming from their work you know. The place was black with people ... It was a busy, busy place then. Industrial. But then it just ... once they closed all these places, then Springburn died (Cullen 2014).*

When the BMC Leyland truck and tractor factory in Bathgate closed in 1986 with over 2,000 redundancies, one worker (Jim Bilsborough) declared: "I just could not believe that they would shut that plant. I kept saying to myself, and I wisnae alone, how can they shut a place like this?" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49).[2] Another (John Cooper) reflected: "When the plant closed I was absolutely shattered. I'd never, ever been paid off before" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49). A prevailing theme in the stories of plant closures was loss; a deep, profound sense of bereavement, of mourning for lost skills, opportunities (for themselves and their kids), relationships, income and security seeps from the testimonies. Another BMC Leyland factory worker (Tam Brandon) reflected about the closure:

> *Don't mind telling you I cried because I was looking forward to my family getting work there. The Leyland had a tremendous input in the social life of people. You've got to understand how many thousands of people worked in there ... and their skills were unsurpassed. I got that word and I came home and I sat and I held my wife's hand and I said "we're finished" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49).*

The workers built a coffin on the final day before closure to denote their acute sense of loss. Losing work was invariably articulated as a disturbing and health-eroding experience for this generation of blue-collar workers brought up within a powerful work culture in communities that exalted hard graft and honest toil and stigmatised laziness (Wight 1993). This was expressed in stories emphasising the work ethic, the joy of work, pride in the job and the close social relationships and camaraderie developed over the duration of working lives (McIvor 2013). In these articulations of the meaning of

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2 Jim was one of 59 oral interviews undertaken in this Heritage Lottery funded community oral history project.

work, narrators often emphasised pride in their skills, as Tam Brandon did, and demonstrated their awareness of risks and dangers in industrial work, the physicality of it, as well as the positive health and welfare connotations of being in stable, secure, enjoyable work. They recognised the innate duality of work: its frustrations as well as its joys; its risks to health as well as the benefits to health and well-being conferred by work. But, a recurring motif in their stories was the deterioration that came along with plant closure**.** A whole gamut of emotions bubble to the surface in the telling of these job loss stories: sadness, frustration, bitterness, outrage, anger, pride, stress, embarrassment, shame.

Oral testimonies of workers speak revealingly of the stigma of unemployment and the journey through identity disintegration as traditional breadwinner masculinity was challenged by the loss of the provider role. Corrosion of self-esteem; a sense of being on the "scrap heap" pervades the narratives of workers displaced by plant closures. One Cumnock ex-miner commented on being "a drain on society" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 8). A Kilmarnock woman recalled her father "felt absolutely worthless [after] being made redundant" whilst another recalled of her husband after being laid off: "he became really depressed and he was on sleeping tablets for a long time" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 9). Springburn woman Joan Pollock recalled her husband losing his job as a welder around 1982, commenting: "He felt terrible you know. He got depressed and all and had a heart attack" (Pollock 2014). Taking alternative lower paid, subordinate work could also be demeaning, stigmatising and embarrassing (Walkerdine/Jiminez 2012). Shame was one of the salient emotions expressed in these stories. "I hated being unemployed", recalled Alex Moffat after being laid off from BMC Leyland, Bathgate in 1986 (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49). The writer Farquhar McLay, who started work in 1951 in an iron foundry, commented 40 years later on the "workerist and productivist notions we were brought up on" – continuing, "having pride in our role as indispensable (though cruelly exploited) units of production, taking identity from the jobs we did and suffering a terrible kind of shameful death with its loss" (McLay 1990: 10).

Unemployment impacted on identity and well-being in many ways, and workers' own oral narratives suggest a clear awareness of this. Ayrshire miner "Tommy" argued that work had kept miners fit and focused and when unemployed "your system's shutting doon" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 10). Sedentary post-industrial lifestyles contributed to obesity whilst rising para-suicide and suicide rates were linked to trauma and to mental illness induced by job losses. Ayrshire coal miner George Montgomery recalled two suicides, asserting: "When they close pits, and dae these things, these are the effects it has on people" (Montgomery 1997: 101). When Kvaerner announced redundancies in 1999, it pushed one of the workers over the edge. A colleague recalled:

> *We came in to the yard the next morning [after receiving their redundancy letter], sadly Eddie had committed suicide the night before, he had hung himself and they thought it was due to – well we dae – due tae the letter he got the day before that he was getting paid off. It was a sad time in the yard. Eddie was a good boy … a good lad (Campbell 2016).*

Another shipyard worker reflected on the closure of Robbs shipyard in Leith in 1984, commenting: "And a lot o' them went downhill very quickly, because their life had

been taken away from them wi' Leith closing" (Keggie 1997). Particularly in Scotland, suicide rates for men rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s, at 40 percent more than the suicide rate in England and Wales (Mok 2012: 246).

Emasculation was another recurring motif in oral testimonies. Heavy industrial work forged masculinity, and a "hard man" style of hyper masculinity, it has been argued elsewhere, was particularly defined in working class communities like Clydeside (Johnston/McIvor 2004). As a Scottish ex-miner noted:

> *This idea, "I'm the man of the family". Whether you've got a family or not doesnae matter, you're supposed to be a macho man, like, go out and earn a wage, like, you know. When you cannae do that it makes you less of a man in other people's eyes (Wight 1993: 102 f.).*

Going "downhill" (as John Keggie put it) could lead to depression, self-harm, alcohol and drug abuse, sleeping tablets and tranquiliser dependency. Witnesses lamented that former vibrant working-class communities had been "spoilt", ruined. A Clyde shipyard worker recalling the 1980s remembered the explosive growth of heroin use in Govan (and his own addiction at the time) and reflected on the lack of job opportunities as a cause: "Disaffection. Know what I mean? They're wanting something, you know? Like there's nothing here so they want something to belong tae, something that means something" (Quigley 2016).

Work then provided meaning and a sense of belonging. Another fundamental form of loss as plants closed were relationships, both personal and collective. Betty Long from Springburn, a chronically deindustrialised community in Glasgow, reflected: "It hurt a lot of men. Not just not getting their money but just missing all their colleagues" (Long 2014). An ex-miner reflected on the impact loss of work had on relationships:

> *They'd nae work, nothing else to dae in the morning, got up, go to the pub, come back hame, go to the pub. It ruined ma brother's life. His wife left ... An awfy lot of men seemed to just go aff the rails (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 12).*

Trade union shop stewards, company welfare officers and industrial chaplains all played a role in the pastoral care and welfare of workers during run-downs and plant closures and their testimonies relate a range of impacts, attesting to the disintegration of the social fabric in Scottish working-class communities. One Glasgow industrial chaplain reflected on the "savage" nature of unemployment, noting: "when you're unemployed you almost become a leper in the eyes of a lot of people" (Potter 2008).[3] This is a powerful and emotive narrative, deploying the "leper" metaphor to denote a sense of mutation from inclusion to exclusion and evoke the devastating impacts loss of work could have. The process was profoundly shaming: job loss could mean being outcast, a "waster", not a worker.

This harrowing sense of loss was connected to the deep attachment many men had to their work. This was very evident in mining, shipbuilding, steelmaking and other "heavy" industries. For example, Glasgow shipbuilding worker Danny Houston commented: "I don't think I would change anything […] Proud to be a Clyde shipbuilder"

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3 I am grateful to Dr Morrison for providing a transcript of this interview.

(Houston 2016). He went on to reflect on the social relationships forged at work, the solidarity and the banter, reflecting, "everyday a came intae work, even if I come in pretty sad, a went hame laughing" (ibid.). Losing work could be overwhelming, especially perhaps for the old-timers. Gerry Slater, made redundant from the Harland & Woolf shipyard in Glasgow in 1963, commented on a long-serving older colleague's reaction on hearing the news he was being laid off:

> *I turned roon and the tears wur running doon the man's face. He didnae know wit tae say because it was new tae ye, ye know wit a mean? That kind a scenario was new tae ye (Slater 2016).*

Another shipyard worker recalled his redundancy:

> *I was actually shattered because that's aww I had ever known. I had stayed in Govan, educated in Govan, served ma time in Govan, worked in Govan, so I was sitting saying, "Where do I go from here?" (Campbell 2016).*

Andy Perchard has recently identified in his study of coal mining in Scotland "the prevailing psychological and deep cultural scars of deindustrialization", where a recurring motif in oral testimonies was that of "broken men" (Perchard 2013b: 80). Alessandro Portelli's brilliant oral history-based study of coal miners in Harlan County, USA uncovers a similar narrative of devastated communities, where the broken body featured frequently in witnesses' oral testimonies (Portelli 2011).

"Work Changed": Downsizing, Insecurity and Pressure

The deindustrialisation literature in Scotland has tended, I think, to focus on the trauma of closures and resultant redundancies and unemployment, somewhat neglecting the longer, more drawn-out process of cranking up workloads, disempowerment, stress and pressure imposed on those who managed to survive and hold down fast-disappearing industrial jobs. Protracted downsizing really characterised Scottish industrial decline from the 1970s to the present. Deindustrialisation brought a sense of insecurity, destabilisation of customary patterns, of precarity. Narrators elucidate how this felt; how working in restructured and downsizing mining and manufacturing companies struggling for survival with rising unemployment and insecurity invariably involved an intensification of work, higher working hours, taking on more risk and rising stress levels testing physical and mental capacities to work. National Union of Mineworkers' President Nicky Wilson, for example, recalled the re-emergence of a "long hour's culture" as working shifts rose, for some to 12 hours, after the defeat of the 1984–1985 miners' strike; "the work-life balance just disappeared completely for a period of time" (Wilson 2014). Disempowerment marked this process. A Govan shipyard worker recalled the failure of a strike in 1999 at the downsizing Kaeverner (formerly Fairfields) yard which resulted in a four-night shift being extended to a run of five nights:

> *They just broke the unions then. I thought the unions let us doon there, pretty badly. To me, that put a lot a people aff the unions because after that, we wir never really the same. Any grievance we had wae the company, the guys oan the*

shop-floor would say, "Wits the point!?" because the unions cannae dae anything anyway (Campbell 2016).

Here was a profound sense of loss being articulated; loss of power as exemplified in a strong trade union capable of protecting workers' rights, and a sense of hopelessness: "Wit's the point". A Clydebank mother articulated this in a similar way talking of her son who "desperately wants to work", reflecting "they just lost the whole will […] don't know how to motivate themselves anymore. They're like "what's the point" (Garnham 2017: 7). Established working patterns and support networks were uprooted, and "protective practices" that enabled bodies to be shielded and energies conserved were abandoned. This was inherently destabilising. Trade unions struggled in this context, as membership collapsed. By the early 2000s, trade union membership density in Scotland (at 25 percent) was down to around half the level it had been at peak in the 1970s (McIvor 2013: 233 f.). One outcome was slippage in occupational health and safety standards, recognised by the UK Health and Safety Executive in their coining of the phrase "a Scottish anomaly".

Loss was felt differently across heterogenous workforces and communities and more acutely for some than for others. I've argued elsewhere that particularly vulnerable people, such as older workers and the disabled, were hit especially hard by the social exclusion that went along with job losses and plant closures (McIvor 2017: 32 ff.). The history of the disabled within deindustrialising communities remains to be written, but some oral narratives from within such communities suggest the impacts could critically reduce opportunities and markedly exacerbate social exclusion, thus widening health inequalities. As one ex-miner noted: "The reality is there isn't any sympathy for you if you've got a form of disablement" (Guy 2004). Older and disabled workers were often more immobile and less capable of moving to find work in the remaining viable pits. And their support networks dwindled as communities became depopulated. We need more work to explore the experience of older, more vulnerable and disabled people in deindustrialising communities and how they narrated their own experience.

Gender Mattered: Scottish Women's Work Loss Narratives

These reflections on the loss of stable, well-paid and rewarding jobs and the social networks at work that went along with them were articulated by male and female workers alike who lost their jobs as deindustrialisation deepened in Scotland. In her study of South Chicago, Walley has made the point that deindustrialisation is not just about white male workers and that we need to shift our focus to embrace the stories of others (Walley 2013: 157). But were deindustrialisation narratives gendered? Some research has suggested that women's storytelling differs from men's, the former characterised as "rapport talk" and the latter as "report talk" (Summerfield 2004; Pattinson 2011). In the "hard man" macho culture of industrial Clydeside, women were perhaps able to express their emotions rather more openly than men. The Scottish literature has tended to rather neglect the lived experience of female industrial workers. Clark's recent oral history-based work on several factory occupations in the early 1980s by Scottish women demonstrates how the threat of job loss could equally mobilise women workers as men (Clark 2013; Clark 2017). These women were deeply invested in their occupations and unwilling to allow companies to strip them of their livelihoods without a fight.

In other instances, mobilisation to oppose closure was more difficult, such as at the Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank (closed 1980) and Templeton's carpet factories in Glasgow (downsized 1979; closed mid-1980s) where plant closures were accepted without significant resistance (Stride 2019).

A series of oral interviews undertaken with male and female workers at the Johnnie Walker whisky plant in Kilmarnock just prior to closure in March 2012 provided revealing insights into how working lives and job loss are narrated and felt.[4] The Johnnie Walker Kilmarnock plant employed 1,800 workers in 1970 and 707 in 2009 when the closure was announced (The Herald, 8th March 2012). The oral interviews suggest similarities in the ways that men and women narrate job loss but also divergences, especially in the case of older, long-serving employees. The male employees at Johnnie Walkerwere more likely to mourn the demise of skill, job knowledge and experience, and identity, to mark corrosion of working-class breadwinner masculinity, and to express a sense of moral outrage at the loss of their right to work. The Johnnie Walker women's narratives focus more on lamenting loss of personal independence and the fracturing of close relationships forged at work. Perhaps partly these differences were connected to the types of jobs men and women did in a gender-divided labour force where the men did most of the skilled and supervisory jobs and the women the lesser skilled (and lesser paid) jobs in the plant. Impacts were differentiated, experienced through the lens of the acculturated values of femininity and masculinity. Several of the female narrators referred to social relations at work being like "family": "it is like an extended family" (Janice Withers 2011); "coming in here every day it's like coming home to your family", said Rhona Roberts, continuing, "It's been interesting, exciting and sad. It's been all of those things, and it's a massive end to think that they're going to close it. Because this is all we've been used to and suddenly it's not going to be here" (Rhona Roberts 2011). As with many male "scrap heap" stories, here we see articulated a clear sense of profound loss and rupture; of a changed world compared to "all we've been used to".

In these female work loss narratives, the meaning of work was defined as so much more than just the labour process and a wage. This was an all-inclusive community where life was centred in the workplace around close friendships and communal shared experiences which had a deep significance at a personal level. Humour – joking and "banter" – mediated the monotony and grind of the working day and that too was lost with factory closure. Stride has argued of female workers laid off at Templeton's carpet factory (Glasgow) that the transition to new work was "less severe" but that nonetheless this represented a "profound rupture" (Stride 2019). Whilst there may have been differences in how the experience of plant closures was felt and expressed by men and women workers, the demise of personal networks and mutual support was evidently felt deeply by all in the aftermath of plant closures. That said, we desperately need more research focusing on the experience of women through deindustrialisation and the gendered dimensions of this.

4 These 16 interviews, titled "Stories from Kilmarnock" were undertaken by Diageo Archivist Joanne McKerchar and are deposited in the Diageo Archive in Menstrie. I am indebted to Joanne for permission to cite them here.

Resistance, Escape and Adaptation Narratives

Job loss might be internalised, accepted and stoically endured; and for some the trauma induced silence. However, in west Scotland there was a radical, unionised working-class culture that drew upon the collective memory of what was known as "Red Clydeside" (Gibbs 2016). This contributed to Scots' resilience to the cultural bombardment of neo-liberal ideas and the attack on working class communities and bolstered the resources to resist and the language to mobilise against Thatcherite discourse and policies. Those who were already activists opposed plans to close companies and mobilised support for campaigns of resistance drawing upon a moral economy and "right to work" narrative. Perhaps the best-known example on Clydeside would be the 1971 workers' occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders threatened with closure (Foster/Woolfson 1986). The dominant activist narratives here were almost exclusively class-conscious and male, epitomised by one of the communist leaders, Jimmy Reid, and his often-quoted plea that "we not only build ships on the Clyde, we build men" (cited in Bellamy 2001: 199).

Others narrated how the traumatic experience of closure radicalised them, energising or angering them into protest and organisation; or how it shifted their politics to the left, or towards Scottish nationalism (Phillips 2012; Clark 2013, 2017). In Scotland post-devolution (1999) this contributed to much more aggressive and extensive state intervention to protect jobs and the rights of more vulnerable citizens, including disabled workers and the victims of chronic industrial disease. This is evidenced, for example, in the recent (2017) Scottish Parliament intervention to reopen the last remaining steel plant after its Indian owners TATA closed it down.

However, focus on the episodes of collective resistance and activist narratives need to be weighed and balanced against alternative stories (or "silences") relating accommodation, acquiescence, adaptation and consent to change. There were many more examples of closures and downsizing accepted without any or much resistance. Perchard's work on the Scottish Highlands also highlights how important place was and how different local communities could respond very differently to plant closure (Perchard 2013, 2017), whilst Ferns' recent work on the closure of the giant Ravenscraig Steelworks shows how emasculation and adaptation were complex processes – and merits more attention (Ferns 2019). And there were also narratives (including coal miners, shipbuilders and steel workers) that welcomed change, for a number of reasons, for example because working in the industry had been so dangerous, or opportunities limited, or work so alienating. So, in these narratives, deindustrialisation and plant closure was articulated as liberating; as escape, as an opportunity and as a respite from "bad" work; as health-enhancing. Such stories, whilst contradicting the dominant ruination and loss narrative, also merit our attention. Glasgow writer Farquhar McLay reflected back in 1990 on his early working days in the 1950s in a Glasgow iron foundry, commenting: "I could easily understand why the working man would be suicidal. He was trapped in a nightmare" (McLay 1990, 7). He continued:

> *The old jobs are vanishing. Nostalgia for these outmoded forms of production – now a marketable commodity in art and culture – is surely misplaced. It was hard, miserable toil in deplorable conditions. People forget the crude anti-Catholic discrimination operated by management and foremen which kept workers*

> *at each other's throats; as well as the callous indifference which led to an accident rate which is hardly credible today. Ships were built on the Clyde because labour was cheap on the Clyde and the people in work were for the most part too cowed and too terrified of unemployment to make any real trouble (McLay 1990: 10).*

Some welcomed the opportunity to get a substantial financial redundancy pay-off, using the money to invest in a new business, like window cleaning or a taxi, and expressed a sense of enjoying the job change. Shipbuilding worker Danny Houston, who was made redundant at the age of twenty-nine from Kaverner in 1987, recalled:

> *I thought it was great; paid a holiday, got a wee car and that but I got a job right away. I done driving, labouring, done window fitting ... I did a bit a joinery work. I'm quite good wae ma hands, but then, the wages were dreadful compared to the wages in here (Houston 2016).*

His oral testimony was probably more sanguine towards his experience because he was one of the lucky ones and had been successful in getting another job and in getting back into the shipbuilding industry eight years later (at Yarrows). The precarity and low wages of this interlude between shipbuilding jobs was also a fairly typical post-plant closure experience.

Others, including ex-Scottish miners and steelworkers, exhibited multi-layered responses to the demise of industry which could be mourned and welcomed at the same time. One miner reflected that Thatcher, almost universally reviled in mining communities, "saved his life" by closing the pits. He didn't think he could have survived another 15 years working underground (Hall 2012: 460). Another miner commented that "wi' the health problems that all miners had ah think it's the best thing that ever happened" (Graham 1999). Whilst miner Joe Bokas recalled: "Glad it's forgotten about … Death traps … Oh, no, ah'm delighted tae see it's finished" (Bokas 1999). In a similar vein, Scottish coal miner James Bush reflected:

> *Well, ye see, in one sense it's a sad business, loss o' livelihood. In the other sense, there's a hell o' a lot of deaths in the pits, a hell o' a lot of disease – pneumoconiosis, silicosis, bronchitis, emphysema ... people are living longer now (Bush 1997).*

In this commentary James articulated a sense of the range of emotions that could be generated by job loss associated with deindustrialisation – registering a sense of relief, almost of joy from escaping exhausting and dangerous work regimes, tempered against the sadness of "loss o' livelihood". His testimony was undoubtedly affected by the premature death of his father, aged 42, of pneumoconiosis. Heavy industry could also pollute neighbourhoods, leaving a toxic environmental legacy behind. One local resident reflected on the Ravenscraig Steelworks: "The Craig, it was good when it was there, but you should have seen the muck that came out of it at night, it was ridiculous. All this shit came out" (Kacieja 2013: 26). The coke oven waste was later discovered to be carcinogenic. Jim McCaig, a former Scottish steel worker who retrained as a

teacher, provides a good example of the minority who successfully adapted to change after plant closure. He emphasised the positives of his career transition:

> *I used to make jokes every day of my life with my colleagues [teachers] who were complaining about their conditions of employment and their salaries and I would stand up and say: "Look, you guys don't have a real job, this is not a job, this is a vocation ... you're never gonnae get an explosion, you're never gonnae get killed, you don't breathe foul air and you're better paid than we were in the steel industry" (McCaig 2013).*

These narratives recognise the health benefits of the flight from dangerous and unhealthy heavy industry. They mirror what K'Meyer and Hart found in the wide range of emotions on display in job loss stories in Louisville, Kentucky in their beautifully crafted book (K'Meyer/Hart 2009). In these testimonies, the lived realities of participants who had experienced stressful, toxic and dangerous industrial jobs first-hand and the culture of overwork during deindustrialisation "run-downs" temper any sentimental nostalgia.

Conclusion

This paper has argued the case that an ethnographic oral history approach bringing eyewitness participants into conversation with academics can add really significantly to our understanding of the impact of deindustrialisation and the connections between job loss, identity, health and welfare. The rich detail, thick description and often intense articulated emotion help us as academic "outsiders" to better understand how lives (like my father's) were profoundly affected by plant closures, getting us beyond statistical body counts and overly sentimentalised and nostalgic representations of industrial work to more nuanced understandings of the meanings and impacts of job loss. The "spirals of destruction" (Walley 2013: 162) associated with deindustrialisation led to widening social inequalities, and Scottish industrial workers' oral narratives speak directly to this lived experience of rupture, loss and deterioration. In this evolving conversation, however, we must be aware of a wide range of voices and narratives and try to encompass these different voices and perspectives in our analysis. It may be tempting to see one set of narratives as representative, but plant closure stories sieved through the collective trauma and dislocation of the event are characterised by their diversity. We might identify a dominant or hegemonic strand of "scrap-heap narratives" where workers felt deeply shamed, emasculated and diminished by their loss. There were others who expressed their agency and resistance in classic, heroic "activist narratives" where injustice was a core motif, whilst others still articulated forms of "liberation narratives", describing the loss of industrial jobs as positive, providing opportunities for change, expressing a sense of relief and escape. And these understandings are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In narrating their lived experience of job loss and plant closures, interviewees are informing and interpreting; projecting a sense of self in the process and drawing meaning from their working lives. We need to listen attentively and learn from those who bore witness and try to make sense of these diverse, different and sometimes contradictory stories and take cognisance of silences and transgressing voices as

well as dominant, hegemonic narratives if we are to understand the complex but profound impacts that deindustrialisation had on traditional working-class communities in Scotland, as well as elsewhere.

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INTERVIEWS

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to comprehend deindustrialisation and the impact of plant downsizing and closures in Scotland since the 1970s through listening to the voices of workers and reflecting on their ways of telling, whilst making some observations on how an oral history methodology can add to our understanding. It draws upon a rich bounty of oral history projects and collections undertaken in Scotland over recent decades. The lush description and often intense articulated emotion help us as academic "outsiders" to better understand how lives were profoundly affected by plant closures, getting us beyond statistical body counts and overly sentimentalised and nostalgic representations of industrial work to more nuanced understandings of the meanings and impacts of job loss. In recalling their lived experience of plant run-downs and closures, narrators are informing and interpreting; projecting a sense of self in the process and drawing meaning from their working lives. My argument here is that we need to listen attentively and learn from those who bore witness and try to make sense of these diverse, different and sometimes contradictory stories. We should take cognisance of silences and transgressing voices as well as dominant, hegemonic narratives if we are to deepen the conversation and understand the complex but profound impacts that deindustrialisation had on traditional working-class communities in Scotland, as well as elsewhere.