

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

B. S. Bacon Toys, Llanrwst (c 1968-9)

Interviewee: VN020 Vanda MacMillan

Date: 12: 03: 2014

Interviewer: Kate Sullivan on behalf of Women's Archive Wales

Vanda confirmed her name, address and date of birth, namely 18/06/1939.

Nancy Denton and her sister Dorothy were also present and contributed from time to time to Vanda's story.

Vanda was one of six children and her mother worked in a bakehouse and her father as a mechanic after the war. She was born in Tŷ Felin, near Llanrwst and she went to the National School after her parents moved to the town, when her father was demobbed.

Vanda left school at fifteen and went to work in a grocer's shop, serving behind the counter, but she wasn't keen on it, as there was a lot of paper work, people used to put their goods down on a bill that they paid on Friday. She can't remember how long she was there. She got married at the age of seventeen. After the shop, she went to work in a woollen mill in Trefriw, which was hard work. She was on the loom just before she left, they wool made quilts. She learned by watching the other girls and picking it up. She can't remember how long she was there and said she earned about £4. She bought clothes from a catalogue with her wages, and also went to the pictures, bought make up.

She can't remember how old she was when she went to the factory. She'd got married and had three children, but the family needed extra money, so she heard they wanted people in the toy factory and she made arrangements with her mother to have her youngest child, for which she gave her mother half her wages.

Vanda was temporary, for about 12 weeks over the Christmas period, but she did this for four years (?) She was in the paint room. She worked from nine till three. There were only two of them doing temporary work in the paint room. Her work was painting the flowers on the side of the houses and also the red roofs **"We got a piece of sack and all kinds of different coloured pots of paint, you bent your second half, you dipped it, then you tapped it like that to make flowers on the houses, you know, dolls houses. They were complete and we'd paint the red roofs."** She didn't really get trained but watched others **"You've got to watch me for today then tomorrow you do it, like. Then you build up, come on, come on, go faster."** There was no pressure as such but just

no wasted time.

She thought the dolls houses were lovely, different sizes and different shapes, and solid, and she wished she'd bought one at the time. "Well, if you had the money, you could, but working, oh, you used to get sick of them."

For seasonal work she thinks she earned £7, she didn't know what the permanent workers were earning "You know, your wages were like a secret in a way." Their wages came round in a little brown envelope, with your name and what toys you made. To the question, did you never tell each other what you earned, Nancy (VN019) said "Yeah, but you daren't with some people cos they'd be mad if you earned more than them." Vanda said they all earned more or less the same.

Vanda can't remember if she worked through till January or finished before Christmas.

8.00 There were other married women as well, like Veronica Edges who had five or six children. Vanda's two eldest were in school and her mother had the smallest one, so her nine to three hours allowed her to collect her children from school. They lived in their own house, her husband worked for a firm called Robinsons Research, doing board drilling. Her husband travelled all over the place so Vanda was looking after the children and working at the same time. She didn't find it hard, especially as the school was right by the toy factory. Her children never asked for toys from the factory.

Vanda thinks her seasonal period was about 1968-69. **"I think it kept you going as you knew you were finishing in a few weeks time."** She didn't go permanent. **"Well, I don't think I could have coped and my mother wouldn't have had my children all the time for me like that."**

On a Friday, she'd go straight to Kwiks and get a good order from what she'd earned. And that was her wages gone she said.

She did enjoy working there "You know, you have your moments but there was a nice gang of girls there. And we were all in the same boat, nobody posh worked there." Even the bosses were down to earth, and very nice and Nancy added that even after they'd finished Mr Bacon and Mr Freshwater would still greet them if they passed by on the street. Bacon lived in a big house in Llanrwst and was "a proper gentleman, dressed nice."

"The only thing with Mr Bacon, you used to go through these paint brushes, you know, you had to cut the paintbrush a certain way to make these flowers, and you had to go and ask him for a new paint brush, knock the office door and wait, and he'd call you 'Come in, what can I do for you?' 'Is it possible to have a new paint brush, Mr Bacon?' 'Another one!' he'd say, you know, and he'd look in this box, give you a paint brush. I used to say to Julie 'You go and ask.' 'No, I'm not going.' Maudie, there's another one, 'You go, it's your turn.' 'No, I'm not bloody going,' she'd say. But he used to be a bit fussy with his, 'Another one? How many have you gone through this week?' 'Only one!'

The brushes went because they girls dabbed them hard and had to cut them into a bit of a shape.

The type of houses are the same as in the photo VN019.5 they did smaller ones too. Vanda thinks they cost about £7 and Dorothy said if not more. **"And that's going back a few years, seven pounds was a lot of money in those days."**

13.20 Vanda stopped doing seasonal work because the place was 'going down' and they didn't want any more seasonal workers. The factory went out of business after the death of Mr Wardell (?).

When Vanda left she worked as a cleaner in a school part time and later she went to work in Bryn Derwyn old people's home and was there for the next 34 years. She cycled there, about two miles from Llanrwst. She saw an advertisement, starting on days first, then easier to do nights when her mother had a stroke, although she never adapted to doing nights. She calls it the best job she ever had, and she was sent on lots of courses to improve her skills, getting to level two in health and safety, first aid, lifting and moving etc. The wages were very good. She stayed there until the day it closed, when she retired.

Regarding the factory, she says you were young, so you were happy. There was nothing she disliked about it particularly.

Vanda and Nancy talked about the staple guns, which they called 'sten guns.' Nancy's sister, Dorothy remembers using them, though she can't remember much else about the factory. She says it was an asset to the town because there was nothing there. Vanda and Nancy were there in the 1950s and 1960s but Dorothy can't remember the dates when she was there but she thinks it was only a temporary job for six months.

Duration: 20 minutes