

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Courtalds, Flint (1941 - 1950)

Interviewee: Mrs Vera Jones
Date of Birth: 28/ 8/ 27
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Interviewer: M. Grant on behalf of the Women's Archive of Wales

1. Background:

If you can tell us a little bit about your background, where were you born?

Connah's Quay

Your father and mother, what did they do?

My father worked, when he was very young, in the paper mill in Oakenholt, and my mother worked in a brickwork when she was young, in Connah's Quay. My mother's parents had shops, businesses in Connah's Quay. A barbers, my grandfather was a barber, my uncle was a barber and my other uncle was a ladies' hairdresser, and they had a general store. They were quite well known in Connah's Quay.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

One brother and one sister.

And did they work?

My brother worked in the steelworks, and my sister worked in the Bee Seed Factory.

And which school did you go to?

Connah's Quay, Golftyn Infants, then Saint Mark's School, and then to what we called the Board School. There was no secondary education; it was what we called the Board School. I

don't think there were many exams about unless you had parents that sort of pushed you to them and then you went to the Central School. That's the only education I had.

And when did you leave?

Fourteen. In the August. And then I went to work in Courtalds, a couple of weeks after.

How did you feel about leaving then?

I couldn't leave school quick enough.

[2']

2. Work

What was your first job after leaving school?

Courtalds. I went by myself for a job, and they interviewed you, just go and they interviewed you. Then you go to see the nurse and she would look in your hair for nits. And then a chat and they would tell you to start.

And then when I started, my mother used to take me to the bus in the mornings because it was dark and I was only a little fourteen year old. So she would take me to the bus for a while, until I got in with some other people and then I could go to the bus with them.

When did you start in the factory?

1941

Did you want to work there?

Well, that's where everybody went. You just went there for a job. There was nothing else I wanted to do. I probably didn't think I'd got the capabilities to do anything else. And yet I've done well since.

Which of the Courtalds factories did you work in?

Castle Works, Flint.

Why did you decide to work in that particular factory?

I don't know, I suppose it was the nerves when I got off the bus. I had cousins working there, probably that might have been ...

What did the factory make?

Rayon.

Was that the thread?

Yes, it went from the spinning, then on to the cake wash, and it came to us. I was in the cake wrapping. And then from there it went to be dried. Then it went to either spinning, coning or cheesing in the machines that they put them in. That was the whole process.

You always smelt. Everybody knew where you worked, that you worked in Courtalds. You'd got that smell about you.

And we had to wear black clothing. Our dresses which we made for our selves or somebody made for us, out of blackout curtains. We had to wear black, so that it would show all the threads and that on us.

Did you need any qualifications to get the job?

No.

Did you have any test... you had an interview for the job?

Yes, just an interview. They didn't ask you much really, wasn't like it would be today, wasn't much of an interview.

[5']

I was fortunate, in the fact that they must have seen something in me, because I wasn't there long. They asked me would I go and do not time keeping but book keeping, because the girls had to do so much per hour, so I had to go round and count their work – how much they had done per hour. Eventually, they went on to a bonus, getting more money and I then wasn't getting more money. So I wanted more money, so I said I wanted to go back on the floor, which I did. That's where I stayed, until when I got married my husband was on two shifts in the steel works and I wanted to work two shifts because I'd always been on days. So I then had to go in the coning; I'd never been on machines before. I had to go in coning to get on two shifts. But I was only there not many months, soon after I got married I got pregnant and I left.

When would that be?

1950, '49 or '50. I got married in 1950, so after '50 – I got married then I carried on working. In the fifties, might have been early '51.

You had several jobs within the factory.

Three: cake wrapping, and then I was book keeping and then when I got married I had to go on the machines to go on two shifts.

How did you feel about working there?

Well, all right, 'cause I think nearly everybody worked there. I'd got lots of friends there. My very best friend, who lived by me all my life, her birthday was in September, so she couldn't leave in the August like me, but when she left at the Christmas, she came straight there and

she was with us all the while, working in the same department. We went all through there together

How did other local people view working in a factory? What sort of job was it seen as?

It didn't ... everybody worked there, you didn't feel as though you were below anybody. Well, I didn't anyway. I didn't feel I was below anyone. But as I've got older I realised I was. But there wasn't many that went on to do very much different.

Since then I've had very good jobs. I worked in Local Government; I've always had a good job. I worked in Shire Hall. But we never had the opportunity, put it that way.

[8']

3. Tell us about the job ...

Can you remember your first day at work?

Yes, it was a little sit down job. In the cake wrapping you wrap them up with stocking, stockinet stuff. Sometimes they had holes in, and myself and another young girl who'd started, we were sitting down sorting these stockinets out, seeing if they had holes in. Boring little job, I think. Then they'd take the good ones and put them on the tables for the girls to wrap them up.

What were your first impressions that day?

Oh, fancy just doing this, not much! But I was soon cake wrapping. It was just sort of working your self in. I soon got cake wrapping. Quite a heavy job actually.

They came on a tray of fifteen big cakes of Rayon and you'd wrap them up and put them back on the tray. An other girl who worked the other side of the table, you both needed to pull the tray out and stack them up. And they were nine high, a stack above us, and we had to lift them up to the top. It was really hard stacking these up, but wrapping the stocking wasn't. It was just doing the wrapping with the stocking, that wasn't hard, but it was the lifting.

Did you enjoy the work?

Yes, it was a way of earning some money. I suppose there was a lot worse jobs.

What did you enjoy about it?

Pay day!

And what didn't you enjoy?

Getting up in the mornings, very early. We started at half past seven, so we had to be on the road by seven for the bus to take you there. So it was getting up in the mornings. You didn't get home then till about half past five. Long day.

You said you'd changed jobs while you were at the factory? Can you tell us why you did that?

I don't know... whether they'd seen anything in me, but they came and asked me would I go and do this. At first, I thought probably I wouldn't be good enough. Then I thought I'll give it a go. So I went and they taught me how to do it. There was only one, and this person left to get married, so I took her job. You just had to keep going round seeing what they were doing, count their work up. They had to do so many, but they went on a bonus system, so they were all doing more than weren't they.

So you saw the whole factory, the whole process...

That was in the cake wrapping. That was the beginning of the process. Men used to do the spinning, and the men used to do the cake washing. It was in like a raw form then, and we used to wrap it, and then it would be washed. Then it would go to the machines: coning, cheesing and reeling – different shapes they would do them. Quite a long process really.

How many other women worked there?

In the cake wrapping I would think fifty. It was a big factory. Where we were was one floor, a separate building. Then there was what was called the five storeys, that was the reeling and the coning, and lots of different things went on there. We were all one factory, but ours was totally different from going up in this five storeys. It was a different part of the business altogether.

Men worked in the factory too?

Oh, yes. Men did the spinning. And they had young lads moving this work when we'd wrapped them up on big trucks. Then these lads would do those jobs.

[13'] I suppose it was interesting really.

Did the number of people working in the factory change during the time you worked there? You were there in the war weren't you?

When the war started, a lot of those, say three or four years older than myself, they went and either joined the forces or they went to the aircraft factory. I do really remember that, and probably thinking I wished I was old enough to do it, and we weren't.

We used to go to the canteen for our dinner. There were two set meals, a cheap one or a bit dearer one. I think it was half an hour or three-quarters of an hour for dinner. We'd have the ENSA there entertain us, I think once a month, really good shows. Other than that we could go upstairs, there was a lovely big ballroom, and we'd learn to dance. There was a record player, and we'd put the records on and we were learning to dance.

In the factory would you say there were skilled / semi-skilled / unskilled jobs?

Nothing... you'd be taught to go on the machines, but I wouldn't say that there was anything skilled. You'd be taught to do that, and that was that.

But there were men's jobs and women's jobs you were saying.

[15'] Yes, but those were spinners. I don't know very much about the spinning, that's where it all started you see. I think that's where all the smell came from – the men spinning.

There was a laboratory there, up with the spinners. I went up there a couple of times, had to go on messages. I had cousins who worked in the laboratory, and they were up there. I don't think it would be very nice for the men working up there. It was like in a raw state, everywhere seemed wet, when I think back.

It was quite corrosive as well wasn't it?

Yes, it was. It was the acid, wasn't it?

Moving from one job to another, there wasn't a progression from an unskilled to a skilled job?

No. They must have seen something about me, I don't know.

[16'] *The training you had to help you with the job – was that a lot or did they just show you?*

No, just a book and counting the work up, that's all. There wasn't really a lot to it.

Were you encouraged to go to night school, or to further your education?

No. But a scheme came out – if you were in-between fourteen and sixteen you had to go to school, which was Flint High School. You went there one day a week and you got taught different subjects. We were taught domestic science, and I think the boys were taught joinery. And we used to think that was marvellous, 'cause you could go dressed up, after being in black-out all week, we could go dressed up. We thought that was wonderful. We had school dinners and we didn't have to pay for them.

Did you get any qualifications from that?

I won a – I was the best at cooking.

And in the factory, were there any married women working there?

Yes, I think that was when all these married women came, when all these young ones left. Looking back, that was when all the married women came. They were part time, they always went home early.

So, were working mothers working there?

Yes, probably got someone to look after the children. That must have been when they came, when all the others left to go to the aircraft factory or the forces.

[17'50'']

4. Wages

Can you remember how much you were paid – per week / month?

[18'] Weekly, about a pound a week and, if I remember rightly, it was 2/6 a week for the bus to go to work, 2/6 for my dinners, my mother had 2/6 and I had 2/6. That's what it was.

Did you have a pay rise at all? Did your money go up?

Very little; I can't remember it going up much, no. I can't ever remember it going up very much at all.

My husband was only on 3 or 4 pound a week when we got married, in Summers – the steel works. So, no, that's what it was then. Obviously things were a lot cheaper then, weren't they?

How were you paid?

Cash! Cash in hand. They used to come round on a Friday, somebody used to come from the office with this little box thing and give you your money. I don't think you had to sign; they'd just ask for your number and you got your wages.

What was your 2/6 spent on?

Money for me to go to the dance and clothes and things like that. I was dancing all the while.

And some of the wages went to your family...

Yes, you had to pay your mother for your board. Don't believe they do now. None of my grandchildren pay any board now.

Were there any perks working in the factory?

[20'] No. No perks whatsoever, really. Only thing is, we used to see the lads, you know, see the lads, and the girls would try to be clicking, that's the only thing.

Because we worked at Flint, we went to Flint a lot at night. We knew lots of girls from Flint as well, and Connah's Quay and Flint was always very close, I don't know why. 'Cause the lads and girls from Flint seem to be together a lot. We used to go to Flint to dance and they used to come to Shotton to dance. That was our life then - dancing. Never used to go in pubs or anything like that, we never went in a pub. So that was our life.

Was there any pilfering that you know of? Was there anything that people could take?

No. The only thing is, in the coning, when you're on a coning machine, you'd get some waste from the cones and you were allowed so much, but if you had any more than that, they'd shout at you. People used to hide it, and take it home. Waste it was, but they were afraid to declare it because they would shout at you. It was just the waste off the cone, and they would

only chuck it in the bin. But if you had too much waste, from the machine, coning round from the cake, if it broke down you'd have to restart it and tie it up again, but you'd get a little bit of waste in-between. You weren't supposed to have more than a certain amount of waste...

[21' 50'']

5. Trade Unions

Were there any trade unions in the factory? Which ones?

Yes, and I was a work's councillor. I don't know how that came about, they must have seen something in me. The other one that was on the works council was leaving, and they all said you go in for it, and they had to vote me in, and I was a work's councillor.

What did that entail?

Once a month we had a meeting with the bosses (*During work hours?*) Yes. I used to come home on a dinner time on that particular day and get dressed up, then go back for the council meeting.

What did the council talk about?

Well, conditions on the floor, really. Not a lot came out of it, I don't think. They were very very strict the bosses. They'd shout at you as if you were children. You'd have to ask if you wanted to go to the toilet. I think that came about because your partner on your job needed somebody to help her, so they'd have to put somebody in your place while you went to the toilet. So they'd watch how long you'd be on the toilet – you couldn't be there long. We were treated really like school kids when you look back; wasn't much different from being in school.

As a work's council rep, did people come to you?

Yes, they'd say things about it. I think that's how they came to go on a bonus scheme. Before then there wasn't a bonus scheme. When they went on a bonus scheme they were getting more money. That came about through one of the questions, I suppose. I don't know if the wages went up a little bit, I don't know, I can't remember that bit.

Were there any union dues payable?

No, there wasn't any union. The only thing they used to come round for was money for saving stamps, wanting you to buy them. There used to be saving stamps then. They came round selling saving stamps. You didn't have to buy them obviously, but they wanted you to buy them.

6. Conditions:

[25'] *You said you had to wear a uniform?*

We had to wear black, the material was blackout material and someone made us a dress, it was all black.

Did everybody wear that?

Yes you had to; all in the factory had to wear them. It showed up the Rayon on your clothes, that's about all I can think it was for. You all had to wear black.

Protected your clothes, did it?

I suppose, yes. Dresses, little dresses we used to wear; take it home and wash it ready for the next week –you only had one.

Was the work dangerous in any way?

No, not in the cake wrapping, no; nor on the machines I suppose. But it was heavy, I think, cake wrapping. Two girls had to lift these trays up quite high onto a stack. That was quite heavy work really for girls.

Can you describe what a cake is? How big or how heavy...

I don't know how heavy it was, maybe about a pound or something. Because it was wet, straight from the spinning we'd get them. It was about a foot long, round, and a hole in the middle.

You'd get it and put it on this stand, like so, like that, and the stocking was there and you'd wrap it around it, and then put it on the tray, and that was your work.

And then you'd lift how many?

Fifteen of those on a tray, and when it was read you'd call your partner or she'd call you and you dragged it off the table and lift it on to this stack. They were high; above your head you had to lift them. I suppose it was quite heavy for young girls.

Do you remember any injuries associated with the kind of work you did?

No, I don't remember anybody hurting themselves.

No accidents?

No.

You were saying about some rules and regulations you had to obey?

Yes! They'd stand by the clock and watch you going in to clock on and clock off. If you went too early they'd shout, 'Wait, wait, wait'. If you were a minute late then all the floor would hear him shouting.

[28'] We had a cloak room, like at school. You went into a cloakroom just like being at school, hang your coat up then go into the room where we worked. That's where you stayed then 'till dinner time. If you wanted to go to the toilet, you had to ask.

And they didn't like you talking. If somebody came round talking, they'd tell you to be quiet. We were not supposed to talk.

Did they play music when you were working?

No, nothing.

Were you ever made aware of health and safety issues? Was anyone in charge of this?

I don't think so. I can't remember anybody being in charge of health and safety. And it's so important today, isn't it? But I don't think it was then.

You said that there were the facilities: toilets, was there changing rooms and somewhere to wash?

Yes, just to wash your hands, that's all. There was a lady in there continually, a toilet lady. They were kept clean. But you weren't allowed to be in there long to talk to anybody.

Were the facilities the same for the men as well?

Yes, they'd have theirs.

[30'] *Would there be changing rooms for certain jobs?*

No, I don't know if the men had changing rooms. I don't think so. I think they went to in to work and came out in same clothes they went in.

Was it very noisy place on the factory floor?

Yes, because of the machines. Our cake wrapping was attached to the reeling and there were machines there and you could hear those machines. But if you went in the five storeys with all them machines going it would have been very noisy in there.

How did people communicate?

Shout! And do you know, I speak very loud and I think that's why it was. When you were on the machines you'd shout, people always shouting.

No ear protectors?

No.

And you weren't allowed to chat?

No. If they saw you chatting they'd tell you to carry on with your work, and you were doing your work anyway.

Then you wouldn't be allowed to smoke on the factory floor?

No, you definitely wouldn't be allowed to smoke on the factory floor, but they'd all smoke when they went outside. You'd see all the men all lined up, there was a little wall and you'd see them sitting there having a smoke.

Have you suffered any long term effects on your health from working in the factory?

Well, yes. I've got a perforated eardrum at the moment. I've had it done once and it's gone again. So probably that's what it's been, you know.

I don't suppose that there's any compensation for that anymore?

No, I've never bothered. There's always in the papers, isn't there, if you've worked in noise. But I've never bothered about it.

Men and women working in the factory, was there a lot of teasing or harassing?

Not harassing but teasing, you know. They'd all say you like him, somebody else would say they liked him.

I think I was a bit envious of people in the office. They used to walk through sometimes, on their jobs, dressed up and we were all in black. And I think I was envious then. Thinking I wished I worked there, in the general office. My cousin worked in the labour office and that's where you had to go for an interview when you went for a job, and she worked in there. My other cousin worked in a laboratory up stairs, and I was on the floor, on production.

Was there any initiation for a young person coming in?

No, you just went. One of the girls would say, 'hang your coat there'. 'Go and clock on there'. Then the boss would come and say, we'll put you on this, sorting stockings for a couple of weeks. You didn't get much training – there wasn't much training to do on this cake wrapping. I was in this cake wrapping most of the time.

Would there be any disciplinary procedures or any case for sacking or management being cross with you?

I don't remember anybody being sacked or anything, no.

You were saying you had to get on with your work, was there somebody time and motion looking at what you were doing?

There was just me going round every hour to see how much they'd done. I'd have to count how many they'd done each hour. Sometimes they'd try and cheat, say they'd done more. Then I would have to go to the drying room and count up their work. I wasn't very popular then, because people would try and cheat. But I'd got it all down what they'd done, where they were up to the hour before.

How did you feel about that?

At the time I'd think, I'm just doing my job.

[35'] Just a little thing – when I first started – these older girls, hair style then was all curly and I had quite nice hair and you'd get different ones, 'Do your hair?' We'd have a little break, a ten minute break, and in the break you'd sit there and they'd do your hair. They liked doing people's hair, and they'd do your hair. Just little things, you know.

How did your husband view your working, when you first got married you were still working?

Well, yes, but only for a few months, because I was pregnant and I couldn't go to work because I was sick, sick, sick. If they'd let me go two till ten all the time I could have gone, there was nothing wrong with me. But I was six till two and two till ten and no way could I go to work in the morning so I had to finish quite early. So I didn't work, I don't think I worked six months after I got married. I started on a baby and I was sick, sick sick.

Your husband must have been concerned about you working...

Yes, we were because money wise as well. We went to live in rooms, and when I stopped work we couldn't even afford to in rooms, so we went to live with my mother in law. We were there for a while, and then we went to live with my mother. After that we bought a house. Now, I'd just had my second child, so it would be...I'd married in '50, I had Raymond in '51, Gareth in '53 and I bought a house then just a few years and bought a house. Struggle, but never the less we'd done it. He worked two shifts over the works, on a bike- no car, nothing like that. I feel proud of what we've done. He didn't get much money, but the mortgage was kept out of his wages. British Steel had a scheme where if you bought a house they'd buy it and they would take the mortgage out of your wages so you didn't have it in your hand to miss. So that's how we come to have our house. After about ten years, I got a job in the Council Offices. The children were starting to grow up then and I worked in local government, then Shire Hall, and I worked until I was sixty six.

[38']

7. Hours / Holidays

How many days did you work per week?

Five day week.

Did you work Saturday?

No, I don't think we worked Saturday. I think we just worked a five day week.

How many hours a day?

Started at half past seven and we finished at five. Eight hours... forty hour week wasn't it?

Did you work shifts?

Only for a few months when I got married. I would say three months, four months, that's all.

What were the shifts?

Six 'till two and two 'till ten; on the same shift as my husband. And he used to ride with me on the crossbar of his bike to the bus stop, then he'd carry on to work.

Night shifts?

I never did nights; my husband did.

Did you like shifts?

Only for the fact that it suited us then, I think it was better on days really.

Did you have to clock in / off every time?

Oh, yes! A big clock, you'd put your card in, clock in then your card would go in the rack. They'd come and take it, I suppose, to the time office and count them all up at the end of the week to make sure you put all the hours in.

I think you just had one week's holiday.

Was that everybody? Or did you take them at different times?

No, it closed down.

Did people go anywhere in particular on holiday?

Yes, we'd go, as young girls, (not for the first few years, when we got a bit older) we went to Blackpool. That's as far as we went – to Blackpool.

And you stayed there?

For a week! Yes, it was wonderful. Wonderful, dancing afternoon and night.

In the ballroom in Blackpool?

Yes, in the Tower Ballroom, and the Winter Gardens and on the Pier in the mornings. That's all we used to live for, dancing. I was doing it 'till a couple of years ago.

You said there was a canteen in the factory?

Yes,

What did you pay for your meals?

I can't remember, but I know there was a like of two tier – a cheap one and an other one. It was a good canteen, nice big canteen, kept clean.

What kind of food did the canteen provide?

Hot meals, a hot set meal. You could take your own meals and just have a drink.

And then we'd go upstairs after, and have a dance round in the ballroom, or go outside and sit in the sun.

Did you bring your own food to work or buy your food?

We used to do a mixture.

You danced in the lunch break...

Not lessons, we'd teach ourselves to dance, put records on and just have a dance round... in the ballroom, a beautiful ballroom. That was really good. And at the weekend they'd have a dance there. And other works, Aber works had a ballroom, but Deeside Mill didn't, that was on a smaller scale Deeside, but Aber was a big place as well.

Do you remember having days off for personal reasons? Funerals or anything you had to attend?

No. But they did have, and I went once myself, ...a lot of people used to be not well with their chests years ago, and if you weren't well and went to the doctor's, I think... whether you had days off without pay, I'm not sure about that, but if you weren't well a few times, the nurse would come to see you at home. They'd send the nurse to make sure it was all above board. Then after a while they'd offer you a convalescent home, and that was free. So they were good in that case. They had one in Colwyn Bay and one in Cheltenham; and I went to the one in Colwyn Bay. It was lovely. I was there for a fortnight and it was really really nice, all paid for. So a lot of people were trying to get on that. I had quite a few friends who went to Cheltenham. They said that was lovely, travelling further afield. In that respect they did look after us.

Perhaps it was when all these rules and regulations came out, when we had to have the extra education, probably got better then.

[44' 30'']

8. Travel to work

How did you get to work?

Bus. And when I first started my mother used to take me to the bus stop. It was half past six in the morning, in the dark, so she used to take me to the bus stop. Like a little kid, really, putting me on the bus to go to work, not school like they do today.

And after I'd been there a while and I got to know different people who lived locally, I used to go to the bus with them. We used to get home about half past five. Meal always on the table when you come in, in those days. And for the first few years I didn't go out much, I was too young. Then when you got to sixteen, you'd to start going out, feeling your feet a bit and going off dancing and that.

And Youth Clubs, I always belonged to a youth club, a lot of us did. It was good in the youth club.

How far was it to your place of work?

Six mile to Flint, I think. ..We walked there in the snow, when there were no buses, we walked there. Must have been mad! Walked there in the snow...I think we were praised for making the effort. Cause all the Flint girls, they'd all be there, in work.

[46' 30'']

9. Social Life

What social activities organised?

Yes. Once a month they'd put on good concerts. ENSA it was called, really good entertainment. They'd have a Carnival every year, and pick a Carnival Queen – Rayon Queen it was called.

How did they pick her?

I don't know. Whether you had to put your name forward, I don't know. I think it was nearly always someone from Flint.

I remember Petula Clark coming there to crown one of the queens one year. It was a big day on that Saturday. The three Courtalds factories would get together that day, there'd be everything there, a very big day.

Was that on factory land?

Yes, I think near Middle Works, on a field by there somewhere.

There used to be a programme that came out every month - Rayoneer. Very interesting it was. There would be pictures then of the queen. If you got married your wedding photo would be in it. If anybody died, that would be in it. It would tell you what had gone on in the other factories, Courtalds factories. Quite interesting magazine.

So there would be Christmas dance? Children's Christmas parties?

Yes, yes. With me being on the Work's Council, I was an organiser of the Christmas party. They'd have one every year, and we'd put a nice party on for the children of the people who worked there. They'd have a nice party and a little gift to go home with. That was an other nice time.

Retirement dos?

No, I don't think the works made anything of it. When you got married the people would make a collection themselves, not from the works, people making a collection. I remember I had an ottoman they bought me when I left.

When you got engaged you'd go to work showing your ring off. Everyone wanted to look at your ring when you got engaged.

A lot of people would come and watch a wedding. They don't today, when anybody's getting married today, but then when you got married there were crowds round.

Did they do any trips or outings?

No.

Any band or choir?

No. I don't remember any bands or choir.

Did Petula Clark do a concert?

I don't remember her doing a concert, but she certainly came to crown a queen. She probably performed, sang, while she was there.

And you took part in some of these because you were an organiser...

Yes. The Christmas parties I organised, that one that year (*Mrs Jones has a photo with helpers at the party*) I got people off the floor and anybody else, all come to help to make it a nice party for the children.

I think we got the food from the Works, and we just had to be there and see to them.

[52' 20'']

10. *Did you enjoy working at the factory?*

Well, I didn't know anything else. I can't say as I ever used to think... probably I used to think, I wish I'd got an office job. Perhaps think they've got a better job than me, they're in an office. I didn't have the opportunity. There wasn't much opportunity about really.

And this job didn't offer a lot of job satisfaction did it?

No, you never got anything out of it. It was just go there, do your job and get paid at the end of the week.

There was no fear of losing your job, I don't think. You couldn't say, I'm leaving here, I'm going somewhere else – that wasn't done. I think when people got there they stayed there. Most people I know did. They started and that's where they ended up, till they got married or whatever.

I'm not sure of the year it closed. Have you any idea?

You left when you got married and the baby came along...

Yes.

Was that why most women left?

Yes, family coming along, yes. If you wasn't having a family you just carried on until you did.

How did you feel about leaving?

Oh, I was glad, excited as well, I was having a baby, glad and excited.

Did they give you a farewell party?

No! Actually, I'd been up in the coning, there were no parties when you left, when you left, you left. But I'd only been in this coning a few months so I wouldn't be that well known up there as I was where I was before.

Did they give you a farewell when you left the other place?

No, just start there on Monday, when I applied to go on shifts, and I was told I'd have to go on machines. So that was it, I left on the Friday and started on the Monday. No, probably I got married and had a honeymoon, and when I went back went up there. I had to be taught that process then on the machines. That wasn't as nice. Cake wrapping was better than on the machines. They were big machines and you were running up and down them, keeping them going. It was better where we were in the cake wrapping, even though it was heavy, it was better.

Did you say you went up to spinning?

Coning... There was reeling, coning and cheesing and they'd come out in different in shapes – a cone, a reel would have two points on the end and a cheese would come out like that, with one point on the end, I think. Different shapes they would come out, ready for use then. All the fine Rayon then ready for use. But I was involved in the very beginning, just after it had been washed, wrapping it up.

And then silk came along, and Rayon done away with. That's how it all went. They had loads of factories, Courtalds, up and down the country.

You worked in the factory for what...?

1941 to 1950 – nine years.

Afterwards you said you worked in local government?

[57'] Always worked in local government after. First I went a rent collector. I was a rent collector for years, and I know everybody and everybody knows me. I talk to people, and I say, I know where you lived. They say, I remember going to the door, pretending my mam wasn't in. It was when it was just Connah's Quay, then after they joined up and it was Flintshire. So I worked for all Flintshire. I worked all over the place, rent collecting. Then I left after years and years, to look after my daughter's child and when she was five I went back. I worked for the Water Authority, local government the same, and I was doing debt

recovery. I went all over the place for debt recovery. Then I worked in the office in Shire Hall, for the Water Authority and I was there for years. I get a pension off them...Nothing from Courtalds.

Are you in contact with any of your former workmates?

Just local people. Quay and Flint people were very close. People married...

[59']

Looking back now – how do you feel about the time you spent working in the factory?

Well, I suppose it's nice to look back on. I tell mine all about it. They say, can't believe it. You know, the children of today, the pocket money they have. And I say, I worked all week for that, and they don't believe me. We had to learn to be frugal, we had to. I've had to work hard for my money and I watch everything.

[60']

The first house we bought, we paid for it within thirteen years. When I went to the council offices and the boss used to say to me, when I went out collecting the rent, just tell them when they won't pay the rent, that you've paid for your house and you're the same age as them. Some didn't make that effort then did they? We paid for that house in thirteen years. We opened a laundrette on this estate, so we came up here to be near the laundrette. That's why I'm here and I've been here ever since. Just two houses I've had since we've been married.

So that's my life! [61']

Wartime conditions:

We had a gas mask. You wouldn't dream of going out without your gas mask. Your curtains at home, you had to black all your windows out.

What about in the factory?

Well, I don't know. When I come to think of it now, I don't know. Because they'd all be lit up, wouldn't they? Probably not. In the five storey, probably not...I don't know.

Were there any wartime alarms?

Sirens. Nothing occurred at all during our time there during the day. At night it used to happen. We used to have to get up, and there was like a little cubby-hole where we lived. My dad was in the army, and we'd be in this little cubby hole, until the all clear went. We'd all be sitting there...

Were there any shelters at the Works?

I don't remember any shelters, but there must have been mustn't there? I don't remember any shelters. I don't remember any drilling for Air Raid Precautions.

One of the effects was people leaving to go and do war work...

Yes, they were. They were leaving, the girls to join the ATS or any of the armed forces. Then there was the aircraft factory. It's had had that many different names, Airbus now, De Haviland then. They were all going there, money was a lot better. They were all going for more money. So then, Courtalds started to employ married women, when all these others were leaving.

They weren't employed before then?

No, not married. Not if they had children, they didn't want them. If you worked there and got married you were alright, but they wouldn't employ you married, if you'd got children or anything like that, or any responsibilities. No, they came quite en masse, really. They were coming in after, but part time, they weren't full time.

Did rations affect the canteen during the war?

Well, it was very basic the food, so it probably would. It was very basic food. That would probably be a bonus getting something to eat when you could only get so much at home.

Duration : 1 hour 5 minutes