

## LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

### Pilkingtons - Perkin Elmer (1968 - 1987)

**Interviewee: Mr John Henry Taylor**

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**Interviewer: M. Grant on behalf of the Women's Archive of Wales**

#### **1. Background:**

Mr John Henry Taylor, born 29/01/1932

*Can you tell us a little about your background, where born?*

I was born in Liverpool, lived in Merseyside until I was thirty. I went to school there and went to work at the age of fourteen at Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead.

*Fourteen, was that the age people left school?*

I left school at fourteen. I wasn't deemed brilliant enough to go on to grammar school for scholarships, much to my parent's disgust, but I didn't want to. I went to serve my time and went to Cammell Laird's as an office boy at fourteen. At sixteen signed an apprenticeship as a pattern maker in the shipyard itself. I served there a five year apprenticeship; then I served two years as what they call a journey man before going in to the Royal Air Force to do my National Service from 1955 to 1957.

On leaving the Air Force I went to work in the De Havilland's aircraft company at Chester. Basically working on the main aircraft, which was the Comet at the time, as a wood-chip maker. What we did, the components were mainly made out of pressings, and we used to make a jig out of wood. It was made out of a material called jabrock, which was very hard. We used to make out of wood a design of the pressing we wanted, it was like a pattern. What would happen was, you'd put the aluminium over this pressing and put it under a rubber press, and the press would then press the aluminium over the jabrock wood fixture we'd made, which would then make out the impression of the job that we wanted, which could then manufacture hundreds off whatever this pattern was. Being a pattern maker involved

making a pattern of a casting, then it would go to a foundry and be cast, which was how I served my time as. That is basically a brief outline of my trade. From that I had the engineering experience of craftsmanship, setting out jobs, which then led on to my further jobs in engineering, which ended up being Quality Control in different factories throughout my career.

*In De Havilland's, were there women working there?*

In De Havilland's there were quite a number of women; they used to be the crane drivers. They had sheds that used to be 100 feet high and they'd be in the overhead cranes, driving. And to be honest with you, the majority of them were women, and they were very apt and very skilled at manoeuvring big pieces of material and wings and things like that. Then you had them doing a lot of work on the fuselages, polishing and doing very intricate jobs. A lot of them were in assembly would be doing the wiring and things like that. I suppose being used to sewing and knitting they were more adept at doing the wiring, I should think.

[4' 15'']

## **2. Work**

*You were saying about your first job, how did you get that?*

The majority of boys at fourteen, when they left school, went as telegraph boys, delivering telegrams, and from that you'd then get a job as a postman, a lot of them would do that. Or where we lived, on the Wirral, you went to Lever Brothers, the soap manufacturers and they'd get a job in the factory and progress from there.

I went in to the shipyard because I wanted to go into engineering, and my father being an engineer it was an obvious thing. I went down there and got a job in the offices, and once I got in the offices I got a job in the ship yard manager's office; from there I had the scope of the yard, every department I went into. I decided on being a pattern maker as against a joiner, because I got the engineering skills and also I got to work in timber, pine basically.

I went in, saw where I wanted to go, went and harassed the foreman; he saw that I was keen. After two years, office work boy, I got to know them all and I went and asked could I be an apprentice. I went and signed my indentures and I was a bound apprentice then for a period of five years.

*Where was your father an engineer?*

He went to sea originally, being from Merseyside, and he was a ship's engineer. He'd worked in Cammell Lairds, of course. He ended up working with Shell, work's engineer and things. So it was in the family, basically.

When I went in the Air Force, it opened my eyes, because then I saw the possibilities, that there were a lot of other work. It made you realise that the world was a big place. You saw opportunities that you never knew when you were working in your little enclave in Cammell

Lairds. You didn't realise that outside there was lots of things going on that you didn't know about. Broadened my horizons then jobs led to other jobs, and life went on.

*From Cammell Lairds you went into other jobs...?*

I went in the Air Force, the Signals Department – Telegraph. When I came out, the ambition was to get back into engineering, which I did at De Havilland's. But unfortunately, the Comets crashed and there was a lot of upset in the industry and engineering in general went in decline. This would be the 1957 – '59 period I was in De Havilland's. After that things in Britain started to go 'pear shaped' as I put it, and to get a job in engineering was difficult. From that I went on the police force for a couple of years, but my ambition was to get back into engineering, which I did.

I eventually ended up in the North Wales area at Hotpoint, in engineering, of course, doing washing machines in Llandudno Junction. The Pilkington factory was beginning to be built; I'm talking of PPE factory, which had a big scope in engineering, it was basically going to be American part subsidised. I applied and got taken on as a Tool Inspector in Pilkington Perkin Elmer, as it was then known.

*How did you learn about the job?*

Actually, the job was advertised in the *Daily Mirror*. I sent an application in; I got interviewed and was offered the job. That was in May 1968. From then I went to work in Pilkington's. It was a brand new factory. That's where I started my last basic job and stayed there until I finished work at the age of fifty five. I had a good run and enjoyed it.

*Did you need any qualifications for your job?*

Well, when I left school at fourteen, I didn't have qualifications. I went to night school when I was at the ship yard. I used to do night school three nights a week, from seven o'clock 'till nine. I was studying for my National Certificate, as we called it in those days.'

[10']

*Was this what you would have got in Grammar School?*

Well, if I'd have gone to grammar school, who knows, maybe my life would have been different, I don't know. I would have gone into engineering; I would have had qualifications that way. I got it the hard way by going for four and a half years at night school studying for the National Certificate. Going into the Air Force interrupted my carrying on for the Higher National, and being a lot older by this time, I didn't continue when I came out. I went in the Air Force at twenty three and I was twenty five when I finished. I don't think night school was on my mind at that time.

*Was the National Service after your apprenticeship?*

Well, what happened in my family, my father had died, my mother being a widow with two children I got deferred, basically because I was going to night school and I got deferred to

carry on my education, which I did. When I came out of the Air Force I carried on working. By this time I was going to get married, life took another chapter.

I had established myself working back in engineering, so life carried on as normal.

*So were the qualifications you'd accrued helpful in getting you into Pilks?*

Well, I told them I had them, and I assumed they must have done. Nobody ever asked to see the certificates I'd got, and nobody ever questioned them. You went to the interviews and they accepted what you told them, from that they must have realised you had it. I always felt a bit down because they never asked to see the papers. I used to take them with me, but nobody ever said, can I see them? In those days they used to take your word for it. Mind you they'd soon find out when you got the job, whether you could do it or not; you were on a trial period, I think at the time. I carried on working, they were happy with me and I was happy with them.

*So your exact work in the factory, when you went in was...?*

I was in Inspection - Quality Control - that was my whole job all the time I was there. I worked on all aspects of Inspection, from goods inwards to final inspection, then I was on assembly inspection. Then I got a job as roving inspector, where I used to go anywhere in the factory and my brief was: if I thought it needed checking, check it. I used to check materials; I used to check paint; I used to check the adhesives they were using, to make sure they were using the correct adhesives; I used to check the specifications of the glass, the paint, make sure the correct paints were used on different types of instruments because some of them had to be radar proof or whatever. American specifications had to be adhered to. You had to get a general knowledge of everything. You had to make sure that there were certificates of guarantee with everything that came in. Every little screw that came in you had to account for it. An item would come in and it would be given a lot number, it would be recorded, it would be given a card, then that card would go with the items into the stores. The stores would then issue them out with the lot number that would be put on the assembly build, the lot number would then follow it right through to the final build. At the final end, that instrument that was built with say two hundred parts, would have a list of every item with a lot number in, so that somebody eight months down the line could pick it up and say that lot number of that item, where was it from, when did it come in, and can you show the certificate of guarantee for it. You could go back to the records and produce it. And that in a nutshell is basically what I used to do, make sure that it was all continuity, so you could follow traceability of the item. So that five years later, if something happened to that plane or the item, they could go back and say that screw was faulty. And if it had my stamp on it, then I'd say, why did you pass it.

*How did you feel about working there?*

I was very happy with it. I got to know the job and the job got to know me. I got to know the factory and how it worked, and once that happened it made it a lot easier. But remember when I went in there was nothing there and I gradually worked with the factory as it built, I sort of grew with it. I was in a good position. Somebody coming in later on, three years down

the line, wouldn't have the knowledge that I'd had from the beginning. You got to know the workforce; you'd know who the good people were and the people who needed to be monitored. I found it very interesting.

*Did the fact that it was an American company make any difference?*

No, not to me, I worked with them, because I'd worked with them from the start. I grew into their ways or they grew into mine, I'm not sure which way it worked.

*Did it employ local people?*

Yes, the factory I was in, the majority were local, you'd meet them in the village, you'd meet them in the pub, you'd see them, they'd be your neighbours - everybody knew everybody.

*Was there a status to working in that particular factory?*

I don't know whether the people themselves thought there was a status. There was a bit of rivalry going on. People in CP (*Chance Pilkington*) would say you work over there; you work in the posh one. You got leg pulling, oh you're over there are you, huh, but it was all in good fun, there was no animosity. I never noticed any.

You'd have your characters in the factory, of course, but you get that everywhere; used to get that in the shipyards as well.

[18'10'']

### **3. The job ...**

*Did you change jobs at all while you were at the factory?*

I didn't change my jobs. The whole time I was there, for twenty years was always involved with inspection and quality control. I didn't do any assembly work. I was always checking work done by other people.

The idea would be, they would get the jobs given to them by their foreman, charge hand, team leader, and when they'd completed a component they were working on they would put it into what they would call assembly inspection. If I happened to be on that particular day assembly inspection, I would take that job and check it against the drawings and blueprints to see that that was done correctly, using the pieces specified, that they were the correct pieces, been assembled correctly and also that the workmanship was satisfactory: like the soldering joints and things like that, that it was up to standard. Then I would pass it and it would go into stores finished. It would then come out again in a kit on to the next stage and then they would assemble it. If I was still on assembly I would check that out again. That's the way things worked.

Some days I would go in and check stuff in the stores that was on the shelves ready to go out, to make sure that they were correct. So my job varied. Things would come in from an outside supplier and I would check then that they were correct. I'd check all the measurements to

make sure they were correct. Then I would stamp them, and they would go into stores to be issued out in kit form to somebody else in the factory on assembly. Eventually it would all be built up into a particular unit, whatever that may be. I might be involved in the final inspection of that particular unit.

I did voluntary work with the Air Training Corp, I used to do camps. To emphasise the point, I was on an RAF Station and one particular unit they were showing to cadets that were there, and I recognised it as one of the units that I had happened to see when I was working in the factory in North Wales. I knew all about this unit myself, having seen it built. Out of curiosity I picked it up, the sergeant that was in charge was explaining it and I'm listening, thinking, you're shooting a line here mate, but good luck to you. I look underneath it and it's my stamp underneath on the actual unit. I'd seen it go from A to B to C and I'd seen it when it had come in for recalibration in this unit on this station. So I'd seen my job right round. I'd also seen it on an aircraft somewhere, when I was out in Germany at one time. The pilot was getting in and I happened to see him get on it and get hold of it to get into the cockpit. I thought that's funny, he gets in, he handles it, yet when they test them, they're so rigid on the test procedure. I thought it's going to need re-setting up again. I had a talk to him about it and he said, it's handy to get in, I can lever myself up. When I got back, I had a word with them in the drawing office and the Quality Control Manager and I said, you know when they get in, they get hold of that. And as a result of that they relaxed the specification on certain things because they realised they were testing it too thoroughly. I'd just happened to be there at the time and seen it.

*You said the factory was just starting up, do you know how many people worked there?*

When we were there, when we started, I doubt if there were in the factory total in the office and drawing office and assembly area, I couldn't be for sure, but maybe 150 – 200 working there.

*Did this change over time?*

Over the period of time there was up to seven hundred actually working in there. In fact, from when I started in the original factory they built a big extension on and the labour force increased. The estimate was that up to 800 to 850, by that time I couldn't be sure, but there was a lot – the car park was full! When I started there was just one assembly area; they built another factory on the end, so that would give you the basic idea. There was a mix of people, male and female.

*Did women have specific jobs?*

Well, of course office staff, I think predominantly female, there was a lot in the accounts (I'm talking office staff in general now, yes). The drawing office, there was a few draughtswomen there. The factory side, I think you'd run roughly about sixty forty, I think there would be about forty percent female actually. They had the glass inspectors, female; the assembly there was quite a few female operators working there; there was the glass polishers. A lot of them were doing assembly work which they were very apt at, they were

very good. I think some of them were doing jobs that I don't think some of the men would do, they were nimble fingered. Being female they were used to knitting and things, I suppose that's where they got their dexterity from.

*Were there skilled / semi-skilled and unskilled jobs?*

[26' ] I think they started, and the skilled and semi-skilled came on their ability really. Some of them were quick and they became, basically on their ability to do the job. Some of them were quicker than others at getting a grasp of the drawings and things, then others, they were trained, they were shown. When you say skilled and semi skilled, the skilled ones, from my point of view, would be people who'd served their time at a job. But these people came in from outside and they weren't skilled because there was nothing in the area that could train them for it. So they came in and over a period of time they found their own skills and their own levels. And over the years as they worked, they'd go from doing the smaller jobs up to the bigger jobs, until in the end they were competent enough to do their own work.

*There was a way of advancement...?*

Yes, the younger ones come in at eighteen, nineteen as they progressed through the jobs they'd get would be more demanding. They would be shown and trained, they did have a training school there. I knew two trainers, especially on the glass inspection, they trained them up to be able to know what to look for. Yes, they were given training, they had to, otherwise they wouldn't know what they were looking for.

There was training, even for ourselves. Somebody would come in and give a talk and especially some of the treatments that even I had no idea of, they'd explain or you'd be shown a film about what to look for or how they'd do it.

*Did you go to other factories?*

I myself did. We used to travel around, especially with castings. You'd go down to companies that were doing castings, just to see what was happening and do checks. There's a local engineering firm, they'd say, oh, can you come up we've got a job on and we want to know if it'll be all right. I used to travel up there myself and sometimes they'd say can you go earlier on your way home. At the time I was living near Llandudno and this firm was on the way home, so I'd call in and check the job or whatever it was they wanted. That meant they could carry on doing the job knowing that whatever it was was right, rather than finding it was wrong when they got back and it would have to go back again. I used to travel to several companies, or sometimes go down to the Ministry place down in Telford to check stuff that was there, because a lot of things would be done, go into storage, then over a period of years the specification would change, but there would be a lot in store. So I'd go down and check all the ones in store that were out of date to have them brought back to the factory to be updated.

*Did they want you to go to factories to learn processes?*

No. You used to take advantage of it, of course, you'd go down there and see what's going on, but that was for your own benefit really. There was no specific you've got to go there and find out so and so. It was like when I was serving my time, you'd go to a foundry...

*You said that there were women working in the factory, were there married women?*

Yes, married women, unmarried, mothers with children. There were some who were single when they came, got married while they were there and had children while they were there. They'd married people they'd met while they were there.

*Could they come back (after having baby)?*

Well yes, if they worked on assembly, they usually came back on assembly, unless they wanted a change or they got a job... if there was no job on assembly at the time they came back they may get... come back into the factory, into the office or something. I knew several that did that.

*They weren't required to leave?*

Not that I was aware of, no.

[31' 30'']

#### **4. Wages**

*Can you remember how much you were paid – was it weekly or monthly?*

When we started we were paid weekly.

*How was that? Brown envelope?*

How were we paid? No, we were paid through the bank and we used to get a chit weekly. Then after a while they went on to what they called... we started weekly and it went in the bank and we had a chitty; then we went on to what they called staff status which altered the whole system. I think that was when the Quality Control people went on to staff status and we got paid monthly - that went into the bank as well. Every Thursday, the bank used to come to the factory and they had an office, and if you wanted money, you used to go there give your cheque in and they'd pay you cash. That's how it worked. I knew there was money involved somehow. Working up there you couldn't get to the bank.

The money, I actually started in 1968 and I think it was about £23 a week. Today it's not a lot of money, but in those days it was a fabulous amount... It was a very good wage. I remember in the interview they said what sort of money would you expect? Well, I thought in for a penny, in for a pound, (the average wage in those days was about £16 a week) so I thought I'd up it a bit, which I did. And to my delight, I'd got a bit more than what I'd asked for.

*Did the different jobs mean more money?*



No. They had a grading system, depending on what level of work you were doing. Obviously people who went in as cleaners were on grade two, grade three, then they had a grade four if you were on glass inspection, then if you went on to quality control there was grade...there was up to grade five, grade six. Then you had section leaders, they used to be called charge hands, then they got posh and they called them section leaders and gave them another grade.

*(Assembly workers)* Grade four ... I don't know about equality of pay, I couldn't say. They all seemed to get about the same. There was a band of grade five, you could be anywhere in that band. Whether the women were on the same as the men on that, I couldn't tell you.

*Were there any perks working in the factory?*

Well, there was a bonus twice a year, depending on the company's performance, for everybody (as far as I was aware). They used to say, oh the bonus is coming out and it's going to be so and so. The perks... they had a shop, an employees shop on site. They had a range of items, and you got them a lot cheaper. If you wanted glass, you could always buy glass from Pilkington's – you just got it cheap, they virtually gave it to you practically. I remember at the time you could get televisions and I know they were cheap compared to buying them in a shop. They used to have a holiday club, you could have holidays and you got a reduction on that. There was a fellow called Mitchell who used to run it. He used to run day-trips, weekends and that, but that was in the early days. Other perks – you got safety boots and things like that, you could get them cheap. That was before they had all the health and safety things they have now. These were things the company did themselves.

*Were they ever worried about any pilfering in the factory?*

I don't know what they'd pilfer! I couldn't see anybody pilfering some of the items we made. I wasn't aware of pilfering.

I tell you what you could do, though. If there was anything they wanted to dispose of, take for instance cars, the company had a fleet of cars. I do know for a fact that when these cars had a certain mileage on them, they would offer them for sale to the employees. If you put an offer in, chances are you could get it. You'd obviously get it dirt cheap. They had things like that. If a chap who was mechanically minded and he had a machine shop, if there happened to be a certain machine going and they wanted to get rid of it, if he put an offer in, they'd sell it to him and deliver it to him! If there was paint that had gone out of date and they couldn't use it and it was a colour you liked, you wanted it and it was reasonable, if you went and offered them in those days a couple of bob (2 shillings) and you could have it.

[39' 45'']

## **5. Trade Unionism**

*Were there any unions in the factory?*

[40'] There was a union, there is the GMB which was the factory union, then they had AScW [Association of Scientific Workers] (Clive Jenkins) which was basically the staff

union. They used to negotiate, I suppose it was pay rises, terms and conditions, but I never knew them to have a strike. I think they had a protest once outside or something, mainly I think somebody had been dismissed or some internal thing. There was never anything that I would call major.

*Did you feel the workers were treated fairly?*

I think so, yes. Well, I was. I can't say I was ever unfairly treated. My first wife died whilst I was there, and I must admit the company bent over backwards as regards human resources. They gave me as much time off as I needed. I had two young children, they altered my hours to suit, so that I could work and get them off to school and make sure that at night time they weren't coming home from school and hours waiting for me to get home. At the time they put a car at my disposal so that I didn't have to drive. They did everything they could to help me out. From my point of view, I have no complaints.

*How did the workers get on with the supervisors / management / trade union officials / owners?*

Well, supervisors, there was a couple of incidents where people had problems, but I think a clash of personalities mainly. I know there were a few incidents where it got serious where the unions had to intervene, but it wasn't widespread. It was resolved, there'd be a few changes made and it would all come out all right.

*Were you ever a union rep?*

No.

[42' 30'']

## **6. Conditions:**

*Did you have to wear a uniform?*

Everybody in the factory was supplied with a white coat or overalls, depending on what type of work you were doing. The majority in the factory itself had white coats. Every department had a colour, inspection was brown (collar), assembly and factory workers had blue; I think the section leaders had another colour - red. There was a different colour code so you'd know what people did. You had three: one was in the laundry (they did the laundry for you), one on and a spare in case you had an accident or somebody spilt paint on you or whatever. You had safety goggles provided. You had your eyes tested, especially if you were in departments where there were lasers. Boots if needed and things like that, proper protective clothing.

*Was the work dangerous in any way?*

Not dangerous to the sense that your life would be in danger. There was one where they used to use certain gases, appropriate measures were taken to make sure you were protected. There was never any fatal accident or anything like that as long as I was there.

*Did any section have any particular injuries associated with the kind of job they did?*

Apart from if you got your hand banged or knocked or jammed... nothing that couldn't happen anywhere, it could happen in the home. I suppose in the machine shop, where there was blades, there could be accidents on those, but there were safeguards there – the machines were guarded. Every thing was done according to the book. I never came across or heard of anything.

[45' 20''] *Were there a lot of the rules and regulations?*

There were rules appertaining to health and safety, yes, which were adhered to like in any factory.

*Was there someone in charge of health and safety?*

There was a Health and Safety Manager, and he used to go round and check and do things. Whatever he was doing he'd do it and there would be reports would put in.

*Would health and safety be part of an induction?*

They did have an induction, when anybody started they did have induction courses when the factory got going. The first week you were given the rules and regulations, it would cover all that.

*How was the factory itself, was it well heated, well lit?*

Oh, yes, it had everything. There was heating, there was air conditioning. They had sterile areas where you had to be masked up before you could go in. You had like a changing vault where you'd go through it before you'd actually go into the sterile area, because of the instrumentation.

*Was there changing rooms for men and women?*

Yes, there was a separate area for men and women.

*And similar facilities?*

I should imagine so, yes. I never went into the women's part, so I wouldn't know. There must have been, obviously.

*Did they play music when people were working?*

No.

*Was it very noisy on the factory floor?*

Depended on which part of the factory you were in. The assembly area wasn't noisy, no; there was a lot of concentration going on there. There was no music played.

*Were they allowed to talk while they worked?*

Yes, they were allowed to talk. You could go and get a coffee if you wanted. They had break times, they used to go to the toilet, there was no sort of, you can't go.

*What about smoking?*

You weren't allowed to smoke in the factory. Obviously, being sterile areas and that, you weren't allowed to smoke in the factory. It just never happened. They'd go outside. I never smoked anyway. They had a special area if you wanted you could go at break time. They had a canteen area where you could go. There were coffee machines, you could go and get a coffee. Even the people on assembly would go and get a coffee, even when they were working; they'd have a break, but you'd see them have a coffee in-between breaks.

*Do you think anybody would have suffered any long term effects to health from working there?*

Difficult to answer that one. With all the things that they had with the health and safety issue and the masks and things like that, if they followed everything to the book and did what they should have done, they shouldn't have had, no.

If anybody was found to have any problem breathing or anything like that and they were on say the grinding area, I don't think they would have allowed them to work in there; they'd have moved them. I never found anybody that had problems, not that I was aware of anyway.

*How did the women workers treat fellow male workers in the factory – was there a lot of teasing?*

[50'] There was a lot of banter going on, of course, as you would expect. It was all in good natured fun. I think there may have been the odd incident, but that would usually be resolved by the people themselves. It never got far enough that disciplinary action would be taken. The crowd worked with them would make sure of that.

[50' 30'']

## **7. Hours / Holidays**

*How many days did you work a week?*

I worked five days a week.

*How many hours a day?*

It was usually 8 o'clock until... it did vary, but usually eight 'till quarter past four.

*Did you work shifts at all?*

I myself didn't work shifts. They did have shifts on – they had a morning shift, it depended on the type of work and the call on the work. Assembly warranted it, yes; another one was the coating section. It depended on how the work was going on. When it was busy they had shifts

on, it depended on the amount of work going through. But the majority of it was eight till five job. The office or the drawing office was nine till five.

*Overtime would be paid?*

Overtime was paid, yes, even on the staff they got paid.

Holidays – when I started it was fifteen days plus all your bank holidays. Then gradually over the years it increased to a maximum of twenty eight days, which was excellent.

*Could you take it at anytime, or did the factory shut down?*

The factory, I'm talking P-PE, CP [*Chance Pilkingtons*] had a shut-down because of the maintenance on the tanks where they had to rebuild them or something, but PPE was ongoing, you took your holidays. Except at Christmas, they shut down – you saved some of your summer holidays because they had an automatic shut down over the New Year because of this starting for two days and three, a lot of them had booked holidays, so they shut it to make sure everybody was off. I never had any problems. You took your holidays to suit. Usually people with children took the school holidays because they had to, and those of us that hadn't got the children we just fitted in.

*No where workers went en masse on holiday?*

Not whilst I was there, no, except for the Christmas shut-down. And even then, if there was something urgent on there would be a skeleton staff or whatever, it depended on what was required.

*You said you were allowed days off for personal reasons?*

Yes, you were allowed so many days if you had bereavements and things like that and you were close relatives, like mother father wife children, they gave you so many days off on top of your usual leave. To be fair, I can only speak for myself, when my wife died they gave me time off and said, just take time off. I was off four or five weeks, by the time I'd sorted things out and children and what have you. There was never any question about ... they put everything at my disposal to use. If I wanted anything I could ring up. They had a car at my disposal. They ran me to Liverpool hospital when she was there from Wales, and a driver to take me, there's not many firms that would do that. They were very good.

[54' 30'']

## **8. Travel to work**

*You were travelling quite a distance to work, how did you get to work?*

From Llandudno to St Asaph it was roughly twenty miles, eighteen miles, say, I used to do that to come in the morning and go home at night. I used to go the back way because there was no A55 like it is now, it was the old road. Eventually, I moved to Rhuddlan because it was nearer to St Asaph.

*What time were you leaving to go to work?*

From Llandudno, I used to leave at seven o'clock in the morning. I used to get to work at twenty five to eight, I was always early. They used to say I'd be first in and first out, and I always was as well. When I got here (Rhuddlan) it was the same, I used to get the same time to work even though I lived on the doorstep. I was always early.

*Did people travel a long way to the factory?*

Denbigh, some of them came from Bangor, in the early days until they settled in and establish. I know somebody who used to come from Manchester, I don't know how long that went on for, but I do remember they were from Manchester. I remember one winter the snow was bad and I travelled from Llandudno to St Asaph, got there and I was the only one in the department and people were ringing in saying they couldn't get there because of the snow. They'd say what are you doing there? I said, well I got in, and they only lived here in Rhuddlan.

[56' 30'']

## **9. Social Life**

*Were any social activities organised by the workers?*

Christmas time, Pilkingtons always had a dance; they used to have it at Prestatyn, now known as the Nova. In those days, they used to have a Christmas party and a Christmas dance. Then you used to go to the Talardy, they used to have functions there. Pilkingtons, after you had ten years service, they used to present you with an award and I think it was twenty five pounds, and you got a certificate as well. They used to have the Christmas do and they'd present you with this award. As you got your fifteen you got another one and you used to get an envelope with the money in, they used to make a do of it. Things stopped in the end. That was when it was a family company, of course, then it went public and shareholders got it and things started to go. But the departments themselves used to have their own Christmas parties – assembly would have one - they'd have a knees up in one of the local hostelrys.

*What about sports clubs?*

Sport clubs were excellent. Pilkingtons had their own sports field, their own sport club, used to have their own cricket club, their own angling club, their own football club, their own darts team. In fact they had every sport you could think of, and it used to be paid for by the company. They had their own fishing club and in fact the fishing pond is still there. If you go past the company now (PPE), before you get to the industrial park (that was all fields) you'll see a pond and there used to be fish in there. They used to have the angling club there and they used to go fishing. You'd see them dinner hour, half an hour and they'd go down there and have a bit of a fish.

*Did you do any sports?*

No, I never had time. My social activities were involved...when I came out of the Air Force I got involved with the Air Force equivalent of the T.A., the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. I ran a squadron of Air Cadets in Colwyn Bay for thirty years. My time was taken up flying and gliding and shooting, that was with the Air Force. My time was spent doing that.

[60']

*Were the social activities that the whole factory would take part in?*

Oh, yes. Everybody in Pilkington paid so much into the social fund. That money then went towards the sports field and all the activities that went on. Even though I didn't participate in the activities I still paid into the social fund and it carried on until...oh, it's all gone now. So in theory you could say that the sport field was bought, with Pilkingtons, by the peoples who worked there.

*Was there any one event which you remember in particular from your time in the factory? (a visit by a famous person?)*

There's lots of things: Princess Anne came; the Queen came at one time. They were celebrating twenty five years of the factory. Members of Parliament would be coming, there was always somebody coming round. Americans would be coming, different ones, I can't remember who they all were. There would be someone coming and a bit of something put on, whose coming today that was the general idea. You'd be busy working and you would see them coming round. I remember one visit, a group coming, it was to do with the work that was going on – aircraft. Someone said there's a group of RAF personnel coming round; I thought this is going to be interesting. As it happened, with me being with the Auxiliary Reserve, this group of officers, reasonably high ranking, happened to know that I worked there and when they came asked where I was. So the visitors that came asked for me.

That was another thing, because I was with the Auxiliary Reserve they allowed me two weeks to go training with the Reserve. Pilkington paid me to go on it, which was another thing that was extra. They also allowed anyone with the Territorial Army or any of the reserve forces, they paid for them to do the fortnight training, or with me, I used to go on camps and they paid me to do it. That was on top of my annual leave.

[63' 30'']

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

I did, I wish I'd have been there years before, but I was there from the beginning, it wasn't there to go to.

*Why did you enjoy it?*

It was job satisfaction, it was the people I worked for and the company itself, they cared about you. They were very good with me, which was a big thing, other companies wouldn't have bothered; they had the people at heart. At the beginning, and for years; towards the end

it was very impersonal. At the beginning it was a family, it was a family that was the whole point. And it was a company world known, Pilkingtons, everybody knew Pilkingtons.

*Were they joined with Perkin Elmer from the beginning?*

There, yes. Chance Pilkingtons that had been there for years, that was there long long before Pilkington PE, and they made just glass alone. Because of the air quality and lots of other factors, they built a factory on the other side of the road. The Americans came and joined with them for the technology. It wasn't Pilkington's core business, the instrumentation side, they'd never done anything like it, it was a branch they went into. They had the glass side and the Americans had the mechanical engineering side.

*When did you decide to leave?*

When I left, the company began to shrink and there was redundancy in the offing, I'd had twenty odd years in and the chances came, do you want to go? And the way things were, my circumstances had changed, family had grown up. The offer was good, and I thought why not; go now while I'm younger.

*How did you feel about leaving?*

Sad in one way, there again I was still with the RAF Reserve and I had a few years to go with that and I could expand on that, which I did. I left Pilkingtons on the Wednesday, I was due to leave on the Friday and I had a call asking could I go to a camp down south. The chap that was going had had an unfortunate accident, and they wanted somebody quick, was I in a position to go down? I had a word and they said, you're going anyway two days aren't going to break us. On the Wednesday I left Pilkingtons and on Friday I was down at an RAF station for a month, organising a camp for sixty odd people.

*Were you given any retirement do?*

I didn't have a chance because I left on Wednesday and on Friday I was down south at an RAF Station. I wasn't worried too much about a retirement do, I was down there. Did me a favour actually, because when I came back I had to go and sign on, they said what was your last employment? What do you mean last employment? Did you pay National Insurance? Which I had to with the RAF, because they paid me. They said, you're employed by the Air Force. What job was that, so I told them, I'd had a commission in the Air Force, and they said you're a commissioned officer, you're managing so ...we can't offer you that...So that settled me up then. All good things had a good ending.

*How long did you actually work in Pilkingtons?*

Twenty odd years. From 1968, I retired when I was fifty five, in 1987.

*Are you in contact with any of your former workmates?*

Oh, yes from the club. At the Tuesday club, which is once a month, and the Monday club which is for all Pilkingtons people, whether they're from St Helen's or down South Wales - if



they're up here they go to the Pilkington club up here. The Tuesday club is basically the St Asaph people who were at St Asaph, and we meet once a month. When we started we had about thirty or forty people, but the numbers are dropping because they're all going, all popping off aren't they.

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

It's just becoming a distant memory, actually. I enjoyed it all; I've got no regrets obviously. I'd like to have been working for Pilkingtons a lot longer; the trouble was there wasn't a Pilkingtons here to work at. I'd like to have started with them at fourteen and stayed with them, because they were a very good company. But there again I wouldn't have had the experiences that I've had if I'd done so. Who's to know, in hindsight who knows?

*And is there anything else we haven't covered...?*

Pilkingtons, life in general, my life... No, everything's all worked out for me. I've got no regrets of any of it; I'd do exactly the same again. I've had a good one, up to now.

Duration : 70 minutes