

**LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY  
FLOOR**

**Courtaulds Castle Works, Flint**

**(1941 - 1946)**

**Interviewee: Sarah Margaret Stanyer**

**Date: 18: 06: 2014**

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

**1. Background:**

Name Mrs Sarah Margaret Stanyer

Date of Birth: 16<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> 1927

*Tell us a little about your background ... where born, where you lived...*

I was born in Holywell.

*And your father and mother, what did they do?*

My father was a miner; we had a smallholding, my mother was at home.

*Did you have brothers and sisters?*

A sister fourteen years older than myself. She was a nurse.

*Which schools did you go to?*

Sychdyn primary until 1939; then Mold Central at eleven. It was very modern, a new school, it was rebuilt, reopened then and I went straight there.

*When did you finish school there?*

1941.

*How old were you when you left school?*

Fourteen.

*Why did you decide to leave then?*

Because I wanted to work and earn myself a living.

*How did you feel about leaving then?*

I was ready to leave. I wasn't brilliant at anything at school.

[2'10''] **2. Work**

*What was your first job after leaving school?*

Courtaulds; on the cake wrapping department.

*How did you get this job?*

I just went for an interview, straight after leaving school and I got this job and they started me straight away. I was only thirteen then, three weeks before my fourteenth birthday.

*Did you want to work there?*

Yes, there was nothing else really, locally.

*Was that why you decide on the factory?*

Yes, it was quite near, just three miles away from home.

*Was there any other family member or friend or neighbour working there already?*

No.

*What did the factory make – the end product?*

Parachutes, I think.

*Did you need any qualifications to get the job?*

None at all.

*Did you have any test or interview for the job?*

Yes, an interview.

*What was your exact work in the factory?*

Wrapping these cakes, whatever they were, rayon. I don't know what they were, but we were wrapping them up when they came from the spinning room; then putting them back on the stacks.

*How did other local people view working in a factory? Other local people...*

Yes, lots of local people from Connah's Quay and Flint from all over the area. It was the main place really, because there was three Courtaulds factories in Flint: Top works, Middle and Castle where I worked.

*How did you feel about working in the factory?*

I loved it at first, it was very hard, but I loved it.

[4' 45'''] **3. The job ...**

*Can you remember your first day at work?*

Yes, I was very tired, my feet were very sore.

*What were your first impressions?*

Well, it got better as the weeks went on.

*Can you describe a working day?*

I don't know how many stacks we did, but that was the only job, just covering these cakes. Wrapping them up and sending them back to be washed.

*Where did the cakes come from?*

From the spinning room. There were elderly men working in the spinning room. Then they came down to the cake wrapping department. Then they went off to be washed, through a wash.

*They came down to you wet did they?*

Sort of, in these cabins, or whatever you call them. They were quite wet then. There was fifteen on a tray to be covered. That was my job, just covering cakes with muslin.

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

Only to a different job: I went from the cake wrapping department, to bringing the cakes in for the girls and taking them out again.

*Where did they come from and where would they go?*

They came from the cabins on these trolleys; they'd push it underneath, lift it up and wheel them and put them at the back of the girls. They would pull the trays off, and then put them back on another stack.

*Where did you take them?*

To the wash, I used to take them. This is when I moved job, when I was on the trolleys. You had to be quick, because the girls were waiting for the cakes, waiting for the work to come. There were four girls at each table...I don't know what happened to them afterwards. They'd

go to the coning department. There were lots of other departments. There were five storeys or it could have been more, the different departments.

*Did you enjoy the work?*

Yes.

*What did you enjoy about it?*

The buzz, it was good. It was all girls my age, young girls and women in their fifties.

*Any aspect you didn't enjoy?*

Not really, I took it all; I quite liked it.

*How many other women worked there?*

I've no idea; it seemed an awful lot at the time.

*And mainly women in your department?*

All women, yes.

*Did any men work in the factory too?*

In the spinning room and in the wash, they were all men that didn't go to the war. I suppose over fifties.

*Men did particular jobs?*

Yes.

*It would be hard to say how many people worked in the factory as a whole?*

Yes, I could say a hundred, but I've no idea really. Seemed an awful lot, a big floor.

*Would you say there were skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs?*

Yes, you had to be careful with these cakes, because if they were damaged, if you knocked them, well they would be sort of bruised and no good, they were rejects then. You had to be very careful with them.

*How could you move from one type of job to an other? Was there any way of moving from job to job?*

Only within the factory, you couldn't leave.

*Was there any way to get promotion?*

Well that was my promotion, to go on the trolleys, bringing the cakes in. The girls were on piece work, and I had to be quick.

*What do you mean piece work? They were paid by the number of cakes?*

Yes, if they turned a good amount, you'd get paid extra, but how much I don't know. Quite often they would be on piece work. They had to do so many over the normal. And of course you had to be very careful you didn't damage the cakes.

*Were you offered any training to help you with the job?*

Well, I suppose in the first week or two maybe, just to start us off.

*Somebody showed you, would this have been the girls or someone specific?*

There would be a manager over us that would show you what to do. To start with you'd stand with a girl that was already on the job.

*You'd be learning on the job?*

Yes, one or two days, then you were away.

*You were saying there were married women working at the Castle. Did they do the same jobs as the unmarried workers?*

Yes, yes.

*Were there any working mothers on the staff?*

Well, I would think all sorts, you know.

*Were you encouraged to go to night school to further your education or day release?*

Day release, yes, in the Flint Secondary Modern School and I took up dressmaking. We went for the whole day, instead of going to work. That was nice.

[12' 50''] **4. Wages**

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

I've no idea. I think maybe somewhere around five pounds a week.

*Did you have a pay rise at all?*

Yes, frequently, especially when we were on piece work. The girls were on piece work, and then of course you had a bit more money.

*Were you given extra as well?*

Yes.

*How were you paid?*

Cash, in an envelope. You clocked in and you clocked out, that was how it worked.

Paid on a Friday.

*What did you spend your wage packet on?*

Well, there was not a lot to buy in those days because you had coupons for everything; that's why I made my own clothes in the school.

*Did you have to share your wages with your family?*

Yes, I gave my mother and she gave me so much back, can't remember how much now.

*Could you purchase the material at the school for your clothes?*

Yes.

*Were there any perks for working in the factory?*

I can't remember.

*Would they have been worried about pilfering at all do you know?*

No, I don't think so. Not that I know of.

[14' 45''] **5. Trade Unionism**

*Were there any unions in the factory?*

Yes, but I don't know how they worked.

*Were there any disputes or problems or strikes?*

Yes, there was a strike and pickets, but I don't know anything about it.

*Did they stop you going into work?*

Yes, it seemed to go on for a week or so.

*Did you feel the workers were treated fairly?*

Yes. You had to work very hard, I thought.

*Did you all get on with the supervisors or managers?*

Yes, but they had a desk and they watched every move, there was no dodging at all.

*Did you admire, look up to or fear the supervisors?*

Yes, they were very very strict. It was important to get the work through.

[16' 40''] **6. Conditions:**

*Did you have to wear a uniform for work?*

Yes, overalls bib and brace.

*Did you provided it, or did they?*

I think I got my own.

*Was the work dangerous in any way?*

No, not really, no. Very noisy.

*The cakes and trays they were heavy?*

The cakes, there were fifteen on the tray, you'd just lift them off the stack, two girls, and then you'd cover them with this stockinet, or whatever you would call it, muslin. Then put them back on the same stack and they would go away then to the wash.

*Were you shown how to lift them safely?*

We had to be quick. Yes, I suppose we were.

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

I can't remember.

*Any accidents?*

No.

*Did you have any small injuries from the work that you did?*

No.

*Can you remember any of the rules and regulations?*

There was rules and regulations, how to do it, you know. Safety, I suppose, wasn't it?

*Were you ever made aware of health and safety issues?*

Yes, very much so.

*Was anyone special in charge of this?*

Well the boss, this Mr Brassington, he was the boss on that cake department.

*The factory, was it heated?*

It seemed very warm there, but whether it was the machines, I don't know. Could be the machines, couldn't it? I don't know. The wash was at the bottom end, and there was a lot of heat from that.

*Was it well lit, natural light?*

Yes, natural light from the windows in the roof. It wasn't in the storeys, it was in the flat, the cake department was a single storey.

[29']

*What were the facilities (toilets/ changing rooms and washing) like?*

Yes, they were good, very good.

*Were there similar (better) facilities for the men (if there were men in the factory)?*

They seemed to have overalls and jackets.

*Did they play music while you worked?*

No. They used to have ENSAs in the dining room in lunch times and that sort of thing, but there was no music on the floor.

*Was it very noisy on the factory floor?*

Yes, with the machines, from the other side, whatever they were doing.

*Did you need to protect your hearing?*

No, there was nothing like that.

*How did you communicate? Did you shout?*

Yes.

*Could you talk to the person next to you?*

Yes, you could.

*Were you allowed to chat while you worked?*

No, this boss used to watch and we were terrified of him. You had to keep your head down and work

*Would you have been allowed to smoke while working?*

No!

*Do you think you've suffered any long term health effects from your work?*

No.

*How did the women workers treat fellow male workers, was there a lot of teasing or harassment?*

We all got on very well, really well. Yes, it was a good atmosphere.

[22'] **7. Hours / Holidays**

*How many days did you work per week?*

Five, maybe a Saturday morning, if you were asked.

*How many hours a day?*

Well, I thought ten, start half past seven 'till half past five; an hour for lunch, and perhaps ten minutes for a break – morning and afternoon.

*Did you work shifts?*

No.

*And you had to clock in and off?*

Clock in and then clock off.

*And when you worked Saturday, did you get overtime pay?*

Yes, I think I did.

*The breaks during your working day, what did you do during these breaks?*

We'd just go to the canteen and have a cup of tea or drink of some sort, then get back; we had an hour for lunch.

*Was there a canteen in the factory?*

Yes, a very nice canteen; good food.

*Did you have to pay for your meals?*

Yes.

*What kind of food did the canteen provide?*

Hot meals.

*Did you go there or did you bring your own food to work?*

No, I bought my dinner there.

*Did you have an annual holiday?*

I'm not sure about this one, I think maybe they had a shut down in the summer for a week, but I'm not really sure about it.

*Would you have had Bank holidays?*

Yes, I think so, Christmas...

*Can you remember how many days a year you had for holidays?*

No, I've no idea.

*You wouldn't have gone away on holiday.*

No, definitely not!

*Were you allowed days off for personal reasons? (funerals etc.)*

I suppose so, but I don't remember taking any days off.

[24' 45''] **8. Travel to work**

*How did you get to work?*

On a cycle, I cycled from my home, three miles down to Flint from Halkyn.

*How long would that have taken you?*

Oh, it was all downhill, you'd get down in twenty minutes; it would take you an hour to come home.

*Do you think other people came from far, or were most people local?*

Yes. Eventually they put a bus on and there were people from Holywell, and all the way along: Halkyn, Northop. We had a bus then, eventually. I don't know when that happened, but that was good. I went on the bus afterwards.

[25' 40''] **9. Social Life**

*Were any social activities organised by the workers?*

I don't remember any.

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

I don't remember any, there may have been, but I don't remember.

[26' 30''] **10. Did you enjoy working at the factory?**

Yes, I enjoyed the company of the girls and then when you got home from there you were too tired to go out.

*When did you decide to leave?*

In 1946, when the restrictions changed that you could leave the factory, you couldn't leave before. I decided to leave and join the Land Army.

*How did you feel about leaving?*

I was glad to get out!

*Were you given a farewell party?*

No.

*A farewell gift?*

No.

*So you'd been how long at the factory?*

Three or four years after school.

*Afterwards you went into the Land Army, you said?*

Yes, I went to a farm in Tremeirchion for a months training there, and then you could choose where you went, whether you went to another part of the country or whatever. But I was quite happy there, and I stayed on there until 1949; from 1946 to 1949.

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

No.

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

Well, it was enjoyable, but I was glad to get out and get out into the open air.

*Thank you very much for telling us about your time in Castle Works, Flint.*

Duration : 30 minutes