

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Courtalds, Flint (1960 -1966)

De Havilland's, Broughton (1968-69?)

Shotton Steel Works (1971-1998)

Interviewee: Sandra Brockley

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

1. Background:

Sandra Brockley, *Date of Birth:* 11.12.44

If you could tell us a little about your background - where you were born and about your parents:

I was born in Mancot, but we lived across the road until 1960 and they built this and we moved in here then. I went to work as soon as I could, and been working ever since.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

I've a sister, one sister.

And your parents, did they work?

Mum never worked; she did before she was married. She was in Courtalds, but she went to the Aber works. Dad was a steel worker.

Which school would you have gone to from here?

We started when I was little St Mark's Church, they had a little school room across the way, so we did half days there (*in Connah's Quay*). When I was a bit older we went to Mold Road School, then you do your eleven plus from there. Then I went to Queensferry, it's down now

– Asda’s there. That only stayed open another twelve months when I got there, then we went to Shotton Central School. I just did twelve months there as well.

How old were you when you left school?

My birthday’s December the eleventh, I was fifteen on the eleventh, and I finished at Christmas when we left school at the Christmas period. I started in Courtalds then, January the first or eighth or something like that.

Why did you decide to leave then?

I’m not that educated, and I was glad to leave school. Some were crying, I clicked my heels together. Then I blossomed!

[2’ 30’’]

2. Work

What was your first job after leaving school?

I went to work in Courtalds, right on the top, by the main road there.

Which of the works in Flint?

The Deeside Mill, in Flint.

How did you get that job?

Well, apart from Summers’s which I wasn’t an office person, I’m more hands on. I’m more dextrous than mental, if you know what I mean. Mum and I went to do an interview in Flint, so we tried one which was marking punch cards...

This is a test now?

This is a test, with a pencil – you had to do it. Another test: they had a bit like cork work-when you get the cotton reel, but this was in a strip and you had to thread the thread in between these sticks or whatever you want to call them. So they said, we won’t put you in the Punch Room, we’ll put you in the bay. So I went into the Perring Section. That was right at the top, in the roof section virtually.

When are we talking about?

January 1960.

Did you want to work there?

Well, I wanted to work, I knew I had to work; I knew I wouldn’t be able to stay home and not work. So yes, let’s go for it, you know. I got three pound a week then, so mum didn’t take any money off me because I had bus fares to pay and one thing and another. At that particular

time she didn't take any money off me, but she did later and I always paid board, as you call it.

If you can describe the factory and what they made – the end product?

Were talking Courtalds, it was more of a process, we didn't do an end product as such. It was more of a process, from these big bales, whatever they were called then, that came in, we had to put them onto smaller things. The perning was more like a shuttle. You know when you're doing weaving?

Did you say perning?

Yes, that's p-e --r- n – i- n- g. I was there for a couple of years, I suppose. That particular part, we did dolls' hair. I don't know why they put them on these things, but we did dolls' hair. On another occasion we had these very vivid, bright colours, they were beautiful colours: blues and yellows, reds and greens; we had to put them on these perns. That was all piece-work, but I wasn't fast enough so I didn't get any bonus. You had, depending on, you had different (not texture) – I can't think of the word. You know when you pull a thread and it's quite strong, and other times you pull a thread and it breaks quickly, well, if it broke quickly then you'd have to tie a knot in and each one of these were called an end. So, if you had something that was quite strong, say there was twenty in the machine, you'd have twenty ends and you'd do them all and you'd be able to run. But if you had something that was delicate and would break, then you'd only have say six ends, because you'd be constantly tying knots in them. When you did a knot (I could still do it a couple of years ago), you always had a pair of scissors, [*demonstrates how scissors was held*] and you'd tie the knot in, but you'd have to put the knot on the outside. You couldn't hide it, you had to know on these different perns.

So the perning was the name of the process or the thing that it was put on?

Well, I'm assuming it was the thing it was put on. All this machinery, the whole floor was perning. When you went downstairs, the ground floor was coning. I never went on the coning. All noisy, but some were noisier than others.

Were there any other family members or friends or neighbours working there already?

No, I made friends there.

You didn't need qualifications to go there?

No.

How did you feel about working there?

It was something I had to do. I didn't have anything to compare it with. If I didn't like it, then, you could walk out and say, I'm not doing that, I'll go and find another job, because they were there, the jobs were there then. But I stuck with it for six years.

The process you were doing the same every day, what was changing was?

The texture of the material they were putting you on. The roof of it was glass, so they had to paint it green to keep the sun out, because it got really hot up there. You need the light, but it was more artificial light, but they painted the glass like you do with a green house. We were cooking! They did look after us that way, but it was dangerous work. When you're doing the perning, you'd always have rubbish left over from either the material (I can't think what they were called) – the cake would be there, but you'd always have bits of it, so if you'd got it and it pulled off you'd always have to keep that. At the end of the day, a lad used to come around with a set of scales, you'd have all your rubbish, that's what I've done and that's what I've had to throw away. They would counter balance one from the other and you'd get paid accordingly, it was all recorded.

You were penalised if you had too much rubbish...

Yes.

Docked your pay?

Never noticed; I never got that much!

You said you never reached the piece-work rate?

Yes, I was never fast enough. The girls used to go along like the clappers, the more experienced ones. I was never fast, but I tried to do it right. I don't know whether they did it fast and not right, it wasn't for me to say, but I always tried to do it properly.

How do you think other local people viewed working in a factory? Was there a status to working there as opposed to other work?

No, it was: oh, ay, you work there do you? OK. That was all right, that was fine.

Lots of people did.

Yes, you've got to earn your bread, haven't you? You couldn't go on the State, oh no, you can't do that; which is quite right.

[11'40'']

3. Tell us about the job ...

Can you remember your first day at work?

Not really. I can remember a bit of a blur.

Your first impressions?

Noisy, a lot of people there, more women, a few fellers. The men were doing the heavy lifting, the fork-lift driving; they were doing manual tasks. The women were on the machines, there was only women on the machines, you didn't see the men on the machines.

Can you describe how you would work in a day? What you would do when you went in and how your day would pan out?

I'd get the bus here and we'd start at half seven, so you'd have to get the bus about seven o'clock, it was only four miles. Start at half seven and you'd clock on downstairs and we had to go upstairs to the top floor – the third floor I think. You knew the day before where you were going to go, which was your ends, as I said before. You'd get your stuff there and get on with it, day starts then. Right, there's the cakes, the bottom part of it, then you'd get all your perns – the empty perns were there – and the feller would come around if you needed any more. Ye, put some more there for us, or that one's broke or whatever. As I say, at the end of the day they used to come round and collect them all up and weigh all the rubbish that we had.

You'd be given a specific job each day, or was it a continuation?

It was continuation, unless the boss came along and said: these need doing (like the dolls' hair), do them, these specific ones. Otherwise you'd just get on with it, and do as many as you could during the day. Put them on the end of your ends, by the aisle, and then just got on with the day.

Did you enjoy the work?

Yes, when I got over the shock of the real life – this is what it is, this is what the world is. Because I was very sheltered wasn't I, in school. Well, I felt I was, very naïve as we all are at fifteen. Well, used to be. Some of the women were rough, shall I say. My dad always swore, but he never used foul language when he swore. So I was used to swearing, but I wasn't used to swearing from a woman. I did join them after a while, actually; which I stopped later on in life. There were some nice people there; they used to help you if you had any questions. You didn't stop and chat, unless you were going for a break, because you had to get on with it – that was money. You had to start and earn a bit of money. If you had a strong thread, shall I say, you could get on with it a bit, so I think I started putting a bit more money in my wage packet then, if you know what I mean, but I was never that quick. They used to do reams, marvellous they were.

Did you change jobs at all while you were there?

Yes, I went down in the Tazlan. The main building by the main road, where I was on the top floor, the third floor, and then the perning was coming to an end. I don't know whether they didn't want any more, but we stopped that then. The building was an out- building with corrugated sheets, but not tin corrugated it was fibreglass, corrugated roof, single storey; we moved into this one then, but I can't remember what it was called. It wasn't coning, they were doing that downstairs, and that was very noisy as you were going through – you had to go through to go upstairs – no lift. We were working in the Tazlan then.

Tazlan?

Yes, a bit like the Narnia story! We were working on lines, but the shape of it then was different. Again you start off with a cake, and then you end up with a big thingamabob like this. The whole machines were all new, they were lovely. Again they were called ends, and you might have forty, forty, forty, and you'd walk up and down, cause they were just running. There was a lot of thread on it, so it would run for quite a while filling up. You know how you do a shuttle, it goes like that doesn't it? [*demonstrates shuttle movement*] You were doing all that. My friend had the end of her finger off.

[*Shows photographs of holiday on the Isle of Mann.*]

A big metal ring, so you'd have one connecting to the other, because you didn't want all your ends to stop, so if there was a break you'd have to take the wheel off the other wheel, but if you hadn't noticed it would gather round this one and it would still be running as far as you knew, but it had broken, the thread had broken. You had to try to get it off, this is why it was dangerous. We got some sort of metal thing to try to do it, probably with your scissors, you did it like that and try and get it off so you can cut it off, but it had gone round like that and looped round her finger and that was the end of that. One of the lads had to go and root the finger out didn't he, get the piece of finger out. Because of that, it wasn't the only one, but it didn't happen very often in all fairness, they had a piece of nylon – Perspex, long with a slight point, then you'd do it with that rather than your scissors.

They devised something because of that, to help you?

Yes. I don't remember her getting any money back for that. There was no claiming for that at all. I don't remember her having claimed.

What you were doing was from cakes, putting the thread onto something else?

Yes, you'd thread it through, a bit like a sewing machine, or if you want to thread your shuttle on your sewing machine, you go round all these different loops and you come down like that and then you start it off. They were about that long and you would start there and do that business and gradually fill up and then switch off. When it came to the end, there was an automatic switch off which would take the one wheel from the other and switch off; so you'd change that. As I say, I was quite good at that. If somebody else's line had gone down, you'd get yours going quick and then you'd go and help them because it was all money, you know. There was nobody coming round weighing any rubbish, like I said in the perning they were weighing all the rubbish, they didn't have any of that there, but you did have how many ends you'd done. OK, you're doing ok with that, you know. Some were better than others still.

Did you say you had forty on?

You had a machine that might have twenty on this side and twenty on that side, and you'd have say three machines – you'd have sixty altogether type of thing, you know. Because the thread was so good you could do that, you'd just walk up and down and keep checking, that's what you'd have to keep doing. It was very noisy.

You were checking they weren't breaking?

That's right, because they were all going; you had to keep your ends going. But if somebody had broken down or something had happened there, you'd do what you could with yours, doesn't matter if a couple broke cause you'd soon catch up, but you made sure that theirs was going now cause sometimes... A supervisor was passing once, she slipped on the floor, didn't fall just slipped, (*in trying to save herself from falling*) she switched that girl's machine off. And nobody noticed. So when they started up, all the ends broke because it pulls too quickly for the resting machine, so all the ends broke. We were all at it there, helping her to get it going again. "How did that happen?" "She slipped." Yes, it could have been dangerous.

Another time, a girl came round the corner, through the bays, having been to the canteen, and bumped her head on the forklift, cause a lad had left a forklift up, it could have really hurt somebody.

You worked with other women there?

Yes.

And men worked there too?

Yes, but not on the lines, they didn't have any ends. They were doing the forklift work or trucks – any kind of trucks. You had the low forklifts (they have them in supermarkets sometimes), they put them down like that, put them in and take the pallet through. They were doing all that type of work.

About how many people worked there, do you know?

No, I've no idea.

Did this seem to change in numbers at all in the time you were there?

People came and people left. No, they seemed to stay the same really.

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

Unskilled I would imagine. I mean, they were good at what they did, but unskilled otherwise, if you see what I mean.

Could you move from an unskilled to any particular skilled job?

I never wanted to go in the office so I never went down that avenue.

The office was the progression, you think.

Yes, otherwise it's all manual work; it's either that machine or that machine – choice of two! I never wanted to go into coning because that was very noisy, and they never had ear protectors.

Were you offered training to help you with the job? How were you trained for your jobs?

If you came in, I'd show you what to do and that was it – that's your training.

It was completely on the job?

Yes.

Were there married women working there?

Yes.

Did they do the same jobs as the unmarried workers?

Yes.

Were there any working mothers on the staff?

Yes, there were.

Do you know how they managed?

I still don't know how they managed! No, I still don't know how they managed; I didn't have the energy.

How were working mums viewed by the other workers? If they had problems with the kids or whatever, was that a source of friction?

No. I was mainly with single girls, 'cause we'd all started at a similar time, so I didn't have a lot to do with them. If the mums would be talking about the kids, it would be ok, ye, ok, but it never really sunk in.

Were they doing particular jobs, married women?

No, the same as us. Some had left to have their kids, obviously, and then started back later on. And there was one lady, she used to come for the winter and go away for the summer or vice versa – one of them. She said, I can't do it anymore, they won't let me do it anymore, just come for six months. That was up in the perning. She said, no, I've got to stop now. She used to go abroad for six months then. She did that for quite a few years, apparently. I think she's abroad now.

She was accommodated for a long while in that lifestyle?

Yes, I suppose because she was a good worker when she was there, good time keeper and things like that, then they would take her on again because she had a good record.

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

Yes, actually we did, not night school. Because we were only under eighteen, we could have a day release and go to the college. Don't ask me what I did in the college, I don't remember. *One day a week*, but it would always be the same day, say it was a Monday, it would always be a Monday.

Did that affect your pay?

Not that I remember, no. I suppose that was their legal side of things with the Government to help us really, with the education. Oh, I did needlework and cake decorating, if I remember rightly.

Up to what age would that have been?

Only up to eighteen; after eighteen your wages go up and you could work shifts then.

Well, I was ok with shifts, there were only two shifts, you never worked nights. It would only be six 'till two and two 'till ten. We used to work on Christmas Eve, and if you were working two till ten on Christmas Eve, you might be able to go home at eight o'clock. But we always took booze in, to be honest. We made sure everything was switched off, we'd all finished work, and none of us was driving, then we had a bit of a party that we could go home early then. But Boxing Day, we'd be back then.

[29' 45'']

4. Wages

Can you remember how much you were paid?

I remember when I started was three pound, a week.

Would you have had pay rise at all?

Yes, you'd get a few pence. The week was Monday to Friday and Saturday morning, so you'd have worked five and a half days for that.

How did piece-work affect that? Was three pounds the basic and piece work added to it?

Yes, but I was always on the basic. In the first couple of years anyway, when I was on the perning. After that, I pulled my finger out and got going like. I wasn't that bad that they got rid of me, so that was all right.

How were you paid?

Brown envelope, cash.

On a Friday?

That's a good question, I think it was a Thursday, no, it must have been a Friday, mustn't it? At the end of the week.

Did somebody come round?

I'll have to have a think about that. Yes, they have like a wooden tray with your envelopes in, yes now you say. Obviously alphabetical order, so mine was quite near the front. Yes, with a little window. If I remember rightly, there was a strip with your name and your number, your hours and your tax. Well, I didn't pay tax, did I, you know.

Were the other workers paid differently because of piece work?

Yes, but we never compared.

You didn't know what other people were paid?

No.

What did you spend your wage packet on?

Good question...Used to be eleven pence on the bus, a day (would that be return?), probably a return; that was six of them – call it a pound. My maths is better than that actually. I used to save up; I was encouraged to save up because as soon as I was seventeen I got a car. As soon as I was seventeen, whee, lets go try this. I passed first time, never looked back – freedom!

Did you have to share your wages with your family?

Not initially, not when I was getting the three pounds, but when the wages were going up then I started paying board. If we were going out, i.e. in my car, but that was later, of course, and probably I was in the Tazlan then and getting a good wage. I can't remember what it was, but I was getting a good wage. I've always got a good wage. I can remember my sister had three children, and at one time during my working life I was on the same wage as Roy when he had four people as well as himself to look after, and I only had me.

Were there any perks, working in the factory?

No, not that I can remember, no not really; they didn't give anything away.

Did you take the thread home?

Yes, that's been done, yes. And sometimes, if you had a lot of rubbish, you'd take that home as well, but you couldn't take too much because they knew there was something wrong then. But yes, that was done, even by the good ones.

Would that be classed as pilfering?

Yes.

Would they be hot on spotting that?

They were hopeless. I can remember on one occasion, I was not guilty. I have done it in the past, but not on this occasion. There was a crate with say, twelve sort of cone things in it, and there was only one left. I went, where have they all gone? All went! I don't know what they used them for, but they all went.

[35' 20'']

5. Trade Unionism

Were there any unions in the factory? Which ones?

Yes, Transport and General.

And were you a member?

Yes.

Why did you take up membership?

That was the thing you did, if you know what I mean.

Was everybody in?

Yes. I was never controversial, I don't like being controversial – go with the flow; anything for a quiet life.

Did they come round for your subs?

They'd take it out of the wages.

Were there any disputes or problems or strikes when you were there?

No, I don't remember a strike. If there was a dispute... I remember taking a vote, but I can't tell you what it was about.

Would you have been called to a meeting to vote?

Yes, I think you have, Right we've got to go into this... They weren't every five minutes, it was something rare. You couldn't, cause you've got all these lines running and it would be such a palaver to get them all going again, you couldn't do it. So you'd have to do it after your shift or during your break or something like that, it would have to be, you know; when it didn't interfere with your work.

Did you feel the workers were treated fairly?

Yes, I think so. I couldn't have come up with anything myself, not that I'm that technically minded.

How did the workers get on with the supervisors or management or even the trade union officials?

Seemed to be ok. You always get the supervisor that's: oh, it's her again, you know, but otherwise it was ok. There was one girl, oh, sorry, it was not Courtalds, it's all right, as you were...

Did people look up to or fear supervisors or managers or the union reps?

With the respect you had to have, you know. The boss that we had, then you had the supervisor, but if you wanted to see the boss – 'Scuse me Mr... (I can't remember his name). See Violet – that's all you'd get, Go and see Violet. The supervisor was Violet Griffiths. Where's that come from?!

['Hello', is to one of the dogs who came in.]

[38' 30''']

6. Conditions:

Did you wear a uniform for work?

Overall, yes we had an overall on.

Did everyone dress the same?

Yes.

Were you provided with that?

Yes.

You said that the work was dangerous?

It could be dangerous, you had to be careful. Might slip, trip, not that there was... the floors were clear cause they made sure, but you had to be careful because if you fall, where are you going to put your hands? You've got these machines here there and everywhere, you know.

You said you remember injuries associated with the work you did?

Yes, my friend got injured with the thread getting caught on a machine, instead of going where it should be going it went on the machine instead. So when she's trying to get it off, the loop, it made a loop I should say, and her finger got caught in that and it took the top of her finger off. But, as I say, they did make these plastic things then to be able to do that rather than get it off with your scissors. You sort of go like that with it [*demonstrates how it was put into the machine*], feed it off the thing so that you could cut it off then.

Did that help?

Yes, it did help after, because your fingers were further away from the machine. Because once it's off the loop, the shaft you can cut it off then because the shaft might be going round, but it's not getting caught on that, it's just these big cogs...

[Dog sneezes.]

It's the thread going round her finger rather than the machine?

Yes, the thread that got caught on the machine was going round this cog, but it didn't have teeth in the cog it just had this big wheel, so you had to get the thread off for it to run smooth again. As you've taken it off, the wheel now is say that big and the shaft is this big, so you've got this big pile of thread. What we normally do is cut it up then, break it off, but it still caught on this wheel which took it round and caught Celia's finger. We were all aware of it, how easy it's done because a few of us had a... the end, you know when you get the end of

your finger and go like that - that's what the thread's done. It hasn't taken anything off us, but we felt there, but for the grace of God, go I.

So you all had little injuries or little things that would happen to you from the machines or the thread...?

Might have the odd cut or something like that, but not really; you'd try to keep your fingers away from it. You didn't want to lose anything.

Did you have any remedies for your cuts or whatever?

No, just got on with it.

You said there was no compensation for accidents like that?

I don't remember Celia getting any. I think she would have mentioned it to me because we were friends, it wasn't just a colleague, but I don't remember her saying about it. It was something you just had to get on with.

Was she off for a long while?

Yes, a fair while. Having said that I don't remember her coming back, but she must have done, come back to the bays.

Would there have been rules and regulations as to how you worked?

Yes, I don't remember... You had to look after yourself. They kept everywhere clean and tidy, because the floors were always clean. Somebody was going round mopping or whatever. Having said that, if it was mopped you had to be careful you didn't slip on the wet floor. There was always somebody going round cleaning up, but there were certain things, i.e. this thing Celia lost her piece of finger on, that you were aware of and you had to be careful of.

In thinking about it, which finger was it – that one – I'd forgotten about that. There was... you take the thing off and then inside it was the bit that connected to the machine, if you like, so you've taken them all off, but you had to – on the end of this, I'll call it a cone, but it wasn't coning - on the end of this cone was a hole, ... where you find them, so this thing stuck out, went inside the cone and stuck out. I remember you had to knock it to get it out so you could put the full one away and get the empty one to put it back on again. I got my finger caught between this spindle thing, trying to knock it out and got my finger caught. Blood went everywhere. I'd forgotten about that. Get your hanky and wrap it round. I didn't bother to go to first aid.

Were you made aware of health and safety or was it just things happening? Did somebody make you aware of safety issues?

To a degree I think they did, yes.

[45' 5'']

Was there somebody special who did that?

No, not that I remember, no.

What do you mean, to a degree?

Well, they were aware they had to keep the floor clear and the place was tidy. You didn't have your bags or anything like that; they would all be in that area over there. When Celia had the accident, then they made these nylon things so to put your hands away from it. It had been done in the past, but it wasn't a regular thing. You wouldn't have one every twelve months even; it might be a good few years before. We were all aware how dangerous it was. You had to concentrate on what you were doing, hence me stabbing myself with this thing, getting my finger in between.

The factory, was it heated?

No. When it was very very cold, I can remember having cylinder blowers, otherwise it wasn't heated. So you (going back to the perning) when it was hot in the summer they painted it green, the glass, so it would keep us cool, but your own body heat running round would keep you warm. There was nowhere to put any heating, thinking about it. You had the machines making heat; if they were switched off you could see the difference. No, I don't remember them having heating other than these cylinders. It was very very cold one winter, it was 1963, that was a bad winter and we had these cylinder blowers then.

What about the lighting, was there any natural lighting?

No, it was all fluorescent – strip lighting. They had some side windows, apart from the glass roof, but that was south east - that's where the sun was coming in so we'd get the heat from that as well, so that was painted green as well. Some of the windows they had that business, if you know what I mean, so they'd have the windows open because it used to get very hot up there. They must have had fans in the Tazlan to take the heat out, because I don't remember it being that hot.

Did you need the light, was lighting an issue?

The strip lighting was enough.

And the facilities, did you have toilets, changing rooms, washing facilities?

Toilets, they had sinks there, toilets that was it. You put your bags there, ok, they go over there sort of thing - in the compound of the toilet, if you like, the ladies toilet area, so that's where the girls' bags would go. A few was lost, a few things were lost, but I couldn't be specific really.

Were there similar facilities for the men?

I presume so, yes.

Did they play music when you were working?

No, you wouldn't be able to hear it.

So it was very noisy on the factory floor?

Yes, on the factory floor.

Was that in every department you worked in?

The coning was the noisiest, the perning wasn't as noisy, but you'd got machines making a noise, but you could talk. We could talk like this with the girl on the next machine. The ones in the Tazlan was a bit noisier, a lot noisier, you mouthed it and gesture, otherwise you'd have to be right up close to talk, and you didn't talk.

What's just flashed through my mind is a feller going along on a trolley and he's checking the bottoms, but I don't know what he was doing. In the Tazlan, there was two lots of machines, the older ones, and that's what we were doing going along on the trolley looking at the bottom part. That could have been checking the cakes, really, thinking about it. The cakes were right on the bottom and you threaded it all up and there would be an arm that would do this business – take the pressure off – because you'd thread it up and do through all these different holes and loops and what have you, and the top one would be a bit springy to take that pressure. So when it started off it would do that business and then go up – when it's fully running it would be up in the air. It's just come back to mind.

You said there were no protectors for your hearing?

No.

You were allowed to chat, you said?

Yes, I mean you weren't talking, but just a chat: How did you get on last night? Just briefly, but you'd still be checking. If your neighbour's checked theirs and you've come back around again, you say a bit more. Because you know it's ok, Do you want to go for a smoke? And this type of thing.

Were you allowed to smoke while you were working?

No.

What did workers do?

Initially they went into the toilet; up in the perning it was in the toilet. In the Tazlan, they did a glass cage right at the bottom there – you're allowed ten minutes. So we went in there and had a smoke and come back, 'cause you knew your ends would be ok and be running again, and just carry on.

Was it in addition to breaks?

Yes, no wonder not a lot of them smoked, you'd have all these breaks.

Going back to the accidents, but I don't know what he did, a lad turned and cut right at the end of his nose off, but I don't know what he did. We were so upset, because he was a good looking lad, but he knew it. Then he had it sewn back on, so he had just a bit of a scar there, it wasn't too bad and he was back up to his big headed bit – Ah, shut up, go back...

Do you think you've suffered any long term effects on your health from working in the factory?

No. I had a phone call about having a hearing test; I only went last month or the month before, to Chester. Nothing wrong with it, for my age it was fine.

You were saying about people teasing and stuff, how did the women treat their fellow male workers? Did they tease them, harass them, or were their comments crude? And how did you feel about that?

Well, there was banter backwards and forwards. One of the old fellers, which we were quite...I mean I was older and experienced now like – I'd been there a couple of years, but his favourite saying was: If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me? He was laughing when he said it, you know. I don't know if the song was out then – there is a song with that in it, isn't there? We just used to laugh.

Did you tease the other boys and men?

Some of the women did, yes. I was never that confident.

You weren't married while you worked there?

No, I never married.

[55'20']

7. Hours / Holidays

How many days did you work a week?

Five and a half, including Saturday morning.

How many hours a day would that be?

Half seven 'till four or half seven 'till five, and then Saturday mornings was half seven 'till twelve.

You said you worked shifts?

Shifts then would be six 'till two and two 'till ten.

And you clocked in?

Yes.

Did you work overtime?

No, not really.

You said about breaks during your working day?

In the perning we'd just go in the loo and have a break there.

Was this morning and afternoon?

Yes, ten minutes you were allowed, or was it quarter of an hour? That was all you were allowed. If you wanted something from the canteen you'd run across to the canteen, but you didn't have a lot of time because of the queue.

What did workers do during those breaks?

Just have a chat, just have a natter with your colleagues.

No facilities to make a drink or anything?

No, not that I can remember. As I say, if you wanted a drink or can or whatever, if you brought one in well fair enough you'd get it out of your bag and have it then, otherwise you'd go across to the canteen. Just grab a drink then, you could get a can, or bottles would it have been?

You said there was a canteen in the factory, did you have to pay for your meals ?

Yes.

What kind of food did they provide?

I didn't have any because I always had a dinner when I got home. I remember going, when you go to the cashier she was sort of perched, I don't understand – my mind's not clear, really. You'd pay for your meal before you went and got it, so it must be a set meal. One and eleven, that's come to mind, one and eleven for a certain meal, but you'd also say to her, if you were a smoker, can I have two Senior Service? And she would give you, literally, two Senior Service cigarettes. You could get them every day if you wanted them. She was a bit like a tennis coach thing, perched on it, "That will be so and so", looking over like Scrooge.

You brought your own snack, your own lunch to work?

Yes, if I had any left. When I was up in the perning, mum used to get me up in the morning, we'd always have a boiled egg chopped on sandwiches, so it would still be warm and I was eating it while it was warm. So I'd have no dinner when it comes to lunch time.

Did you have an annual holiday allowance?

The factory closed down last week in July, first week in August. So on the first year, because I hadn't built up any credit, if you like, didn't get paid for that, but I could go to the Social and say, I've got two weeks off and I'm not getting paid, and they would give me some money. That was that year, and then I built up holidays by the time the following years came along.

Would you have Bank holidays?

Not that I remember.

You said about Christmas?

Yes, we had Christmas day off, that's it.

And you were back in on Boxing Day, you said.

Yes, and we didn't have New Year off, that was just another day that was.

No Bank Holidays in the summer?

Not that I remember, perhaps we had the August, but I don't remember that one actually.

That fortnight were your holiday days?

Yes.

Where did you go on holiday?

Well, we went to the Isle of Mann, Celia and I after she had the accident. Saw Acker Bilk on the street.

Would you have been allowed days off for personal reasons - to go to a funeral, or to go to the dentist or whatever?

We had a dentist coming round. Yes, they had the doctors, they had a dentist; Hawker Siddeley had a dentils as well. I think I'm getting mixed up with Hawker Siddeley. So I suppose if you had to go to the dentist you'd get the least time off, get your appointment as near to the end of the day as you could. If you had the appointment in the morning then you would go to work after, but you'd see Violet about a note.

So your clocking on and clocking off would be affected and your pay would be affected?

Yes.

[1 hour 2']

8. Travel to work

You said you went to work on the bus?

I went to work on the bus, yes. There was only two factories going then, that would be Deeside and the Castle, you would just have the odd person in the Aber works. We'd stop at Flint, we'd still be picking up all the way along. I don't remember where they started.

This is the works bus now, but you still paid to go on it?

Yes, but I don't remember where they started, but they picked up all the way along. Stopped not by the Castle Works itself, but we stopped at the Raven pub and all the Castle people would get off there. Our bus would go up to Deeside and we'd all pile off. It would then go up towards Aber if there was anybody left on it.

So there was a convenient bus when you were going home as well?

Yes, that was in the grounds, yes, that would be in the drive. In the perning, as we came out of the building we could more or less get on it in the drive, in the road there and then go pick the Castle people up, which would be waiting across the road from the Raven. They'd all be sitting there waiting for the bus at the church on the corner.

You said it was a four mile journey.

Yes, about four miles.

Other workers, do you know how far other people would be coming?

No, I couldn't tell you really.

How long would that have taken to go from here to work?

Well, the bus would be here about five to seven and we had to clock on for half seven. It was usually twenty past, twenty five past when we got there. Twenty five minutes, something like that.

When I could drive, then I went in the car because there was two girls up here, sisters, and I used to pick them up. When we were on shifts, that is. I used to pick them up and go to work. When we were on two till ten, one of the girls still had creases in her face 'cause she'd just got up.

Were there buses at the shift time or would you have had Crossville then?

It was Crossville anyway.

[1 hour 5']

9. Social Life

Were any social activities organised by the workers?

Not that I remember.

Did you attend retirement dos?

No, if anybody was leaving then you'd say ta ra to them at the end of their shift, and that would be it.

Did they have any Sports clubs?

Not to my knowledge.

Is there any one event which you remember in particular from your time, somebody visiting or somebody famous coming round or anything like that?

No.

[1 hour 6' 40"]

10. Did you enjoy working at Courtalds?

Yes, we had a laugh and things like that there. I still see the odd person that worked there and say hello to them.

When did you decide to leave?

I was getting unsettled. Nobody was coming with me on this particular day, I was working two till ten, nobody sharing the car 'cause they were on a different shift or whatever, I drove and I drove straight past and I went to Rhyl. Then I come back home again, I was back home about half six. "What are you doing here?" "I've been to Rhyl." "Oh, ok." So went in the following day and the supervisor (this one that had slipped and switched the machines off) she said, "Well where were you yesterday?"

Nobody did the ends that I was on, on the machine. "I went to Rhyl." "Oh, ok." I gave my notice in; it was time to leave, time to move on. I was thinking, no, I'm not going in today and I drove right past.

How old were you then?

1966, so I'd be twenty one then.

Yes, six years.

How did you feel about leaving the place?

It was time to move on.

Did they give you a farewell party?

Yes, the girls do a collection and a bunch of flowers, or whatever it was, not from the management, but the supervisor said, Sorry you're leaving. And that was it then. I 'was a bit emotional then. It was still the right decision to go, but emotional because it's an emotional time when you're going, isn't it? That was it, move on.

What did you do after that?

Immediately after that, I can't remember. I know I went to work in the petrol station, not sure what year that was, that was only months, but I think that was later – in the seventies, to be honest.

I went to Hawker Siddeley and got a job there. So I was a crane driver there.

How did you do that?

It's lovely – a great job.

Did you just walk in, or was the job advertised or

I think it must have been advertised.

For a crane driver?

No. I knew Mrs Whitehouse, she was supervisor of the crane drivers, I knew her. I didn't do the crane driving straight away. They were doing Hawker Siddeleys 125s, which is executive planes - these little planes. I applied in there and I was doing: when the fellers are working on the plane itself, you know yourself when you drill you have little bits of shavings, the girls then had little vacuum cleaners and we'd suck all these shavings up. I was going round doing that for a while. Then I went to see Eileen Whitehouse because a vacancy had come up – one of the girls had left to have a baby.

So it was girls on the cranes?

Yes, during the day it was girls, always was, since the war. My dad always talked about slingers, I was aware of slingers, I knew what they were doing, I knew what a slinger was and things like this. The slinger is the person that puts the rope around the article that you want to lift. I knew the language, if you know what I mean, and my brain worked that way. So I went to Eileen and said about it and did a proper applying. Right come on then, so the pair of us went up the ladders, got into the crane. Ok, can you do this, that, and the other? – Yes, ok, so that was it. And I was a crane driver. And that only lasted twelve months, 'cause I left to have a baby. He's now in Australia with his family, he lives there.

What was she doing when you went up in the crane, was she testing you, showing you?

This is what you would be doing. They're what's known as overhead cranes over there. So one of the girls would take you up there, you're on probation shall I say. Ok, come and do the job, and if you can do it you can do it.

Not everybody will like the height will they?

Yes, that's right. I don't have trouble with the height if there's something in front of me; if you just suspend me there, I'll fall. We went up and did a bit of driving and put on the hook over there because the cab shifted along the crane. Beg your pardon, the hook was under the cab, so it wasn't as if you were sending the hook out that way, you were over the hook if you see what I mean. So you look down like that and you send it along to where they wanted it and they put the ropes on, put the slings on.

You worked as a team did you, with your slingers?

The lads who were doing the slinging would only be in that area. We waited for the phone to ring. On one occasion, this girl used to wind the feller up in this particular area, and she said,

I've seen the lorry coming in with the engines from Rolls Royce so what's the name will be ringing in a minute. So the phone would go (the lorry's in now), it's him, she'd answer it, "Canteen." Oh, bloody hell," and he'd put it back down again. And she'd do this two or three times. He'd say, "Will you stop doing that." Or he might come cross, "Look..." She used to wind him up terrible. We knew where it was, these engines had to be off-loaded off the lorries and then you'd put them in these cradles, or if the engines wants putting in the planes now, onto the wings. And then sometimes you'd have to lift the wings up, because the wings have been made here, but they want to be put over there. They'd lift them up and have the slings from the wings and then they'd have a rope on the end of the wings to turn it. Now it's a big factory, with big wings as well, but the two wings are together, not just one wing, but the two wings would be together and the fuselage goes in the middle – fits in the middle. You go along, but if you went that way you'd bump in the wall, so I'd have to nudge it going this way, while they turned the wings going that way, if you see what I mean, from the floor. Then you go along then because it's straight. If you got to a certain area, right over in that left corner the electric run out on the crane, so you'd go along like that, and oh, flipping heck, you've got no juice now. Can you go tell them I'm stuck? OK. So they'd go across, get another crane to give you a nudge to give you the power back again. Then the pair of you would go back.

So the crane was attached to something and you'd move along?

Yes, it was on girders. Sometimes you'd come down, you'd always have steps, you wouldn't actually have a ladder ladder, you'd have steps, but they were quite steep. It was fifty foot up in the air. Even though it was fifty foot, by the time you'd got your hook and slings, sometimes you hardly had room above the next station. So they had to shorten the slings and things like this.

There was one area: They want you over in (it will come to me in a minute what the area was called) – tricoethylene bath, which was a long bath, but your stairs were here to get into the cab and you'd get into the cab. OK, where do you want me? So we'd pick up this metal obviously, that they wanted cleaning, because tricoethylene heats the metal up and cleans it of any grease or anything like that. But you might be there for a couple of hours. You didn't have to worry about the office, because they knew where you were, but if it was coming up to lunch time, in fact, some of the girls used to take their knitting because you were stuck, you couldn't get out of the cab. And on that particular crane you weren't over the hook, but you were in line with it. If the hook was hanging over the tricoethylene bath, you weren't, you were a little bit further back away from the fumes, but you couldn't get to the ladder to come off at the same time. You were in line with the hook.

You were suspending a metal into...

Into the tricoethylene bath, yes. You were stuck there. Right you're going to be there for a couple of hours, so you take your lunch with you. If you wanted baked beans or anything like that, they'd tie a piece of wire, dip it in the bath and leave it there a little while and then you'd have hot beans, take a tin opener and you could eat your beans or your soup or whatever. And then you'd have your lunch up there. As I say, the girls, because they knew

they were stuck for a couple of hours, they took their knitting with them, and they were allowed to do that, otherwise you'd sit there doing nothing, you know.

So was that better pay in De Havilland's

The crane driving was good pay. You only worked nights one night because of something or other, I can't remember what it was, but that was boring. You were falling asleep waiting for the work to come in, it was dark, you know. I've got a natural thing, if it's dark I go to sleep and if it's light I wake up.

So you'd be waiting for work. You'd be in an office and if they needed things moving...

Yes, they'd give you a ring or pop in, depending how far away they were.

Did you enjoy that work?

Yes, I did. It was good that was. But once you've been through De Hav's or Hawker Siddeley as it was at the time, you weren't allowed to go back. If you left, you weren't allowed to go back. I don't know... I think it was, not health... any bombs or anything like that they were concerned about, you know.

[1hour 20' 40'']

After Hawker Siddeley, where did you work after that?

That's when I thought it was the petrol station. There was a Kwiks, here - across the road - I was there when they changed the money over [1971], to the silly money. Mind you I still wouldn't mind a bucket-full of it.

You had to remember all the prices didn't you?

Yes, I was good at that. But I couldn't do... they did a test - every week they put trolleys and every item, one of every item in the trolley, so you'd have to go through it so you'd remember. You'd have a piece of paper, they've changed this item - baked beans - gone up a penny, and you'd clock it in your head. How on earth do you remember all those thousands of things? As I say, they had all these trolleys with all the items in, so you'd go through it in pound, shillings, and pence, but the same item she wanted me to do it in decimal. I got so upset because I couldn't do it in decimal. So she said, "Do you know what it is in decimal?" So I said, yes. "Forget the Lsd, do it in decimal." So I went through them all in decimal, forget the Lsd, don't worry about it. I just couldn't convert it straight away like that. Some people can, but I wasn't able to.

And then I went to Summers's, the Steel works.

What were you doing there?

Van driver. Oh, I used to be on the bread - that's what I did. Before Hawker Siddeley, when I left Courtalds, I went on delivering bread for the Co-op, door to door.

So that stood you in good stead for John Summers?

Yes, when I went there, Mrs Parker, she said, "I'll have you; you've got all this driving experience." I just loved driving; I'd got all this driving experience. So I worked in the central canteen – that was my base – put all the stuff in for what we called satellites in Summers's. So I had to go round with chips, raw chips, to all the canteens. There was a brick building, central canteen. Occasionally we'd go down to the top office and get some other stuff. Christmas time, that was busy, because you'd got all the turkeys to take out to all the satellites, so I'd be backwards and forwards and I'd do miles; go out with the gravy as well. I used to like that as well.

Were you the only woman driver there?

Yes, I was the only one doing that. There was a feller doing the lorry at night, but he wasn't delivering to the canteens, he'd go round the bays selling butties and things like that, 'cause there wouldn't be any canteens then.

You did a variety of things didn't you?

Yes, I do like variety. I worked in Willar Rose in Chester – developing films for a short while. I only did that for six months, that was boring. I wasn't made for sitting down.

How long were you in Summers?

Thirty years. Started in seventy one and finished ninety eight.

Were you driving all that time?

No. After the driving – they were starting to cut that out – so I went on the vending machines, filling them up, going through all the bays. When the strike came, when we started back, I applied for a job in the offices (What was I doing then?), some on the computer as well (It will come to me in a minute.). My memory's gone! They used to mix metal, steel, for pellets, in Summers's, in one part and I was in that area putting in the results in the computer. On one occasion: because they used to make the metal and they used to wipe it over and do the different tests on it, they used to have all theses rags and things like that, so they'd wipe all the oil off it, and they had some contractors in. The contractors said, What are you doing? So the feller said, just wiping it down with this rag. He said, that's my shirt! Whether or not he was teasing him, I don't know.

[1 hour 26']

What did you finish off doing in Summers's?

I worked in Sales. The fellers out of the works would ring us up, we need this, that and the other, and we need this gauge – like your clock type of gauge – or a meter. I was going through the list, I want a gas meter, and I want this meter. So I rung up and I said, I want a thermo-meter, and she said, What? I said, I want a thermo-meter. She said, A thermometer? Oh, it's been a long day! Because the words were split on different rows.

Are you in contact with any of your former workmates?

Only Paulin, who I worked with last (in the Steel Works).

So you would have been there when it shut down?

It's still going. Shotton is still going.

Which one shut down?

What they did, they took the coke ovens and the blast furnaces, they stopped all that. So you've got the Paper Mill and things like that on it now, but you've still got the processing. They don't make steel there anymore, which they used to make steel. One of the jobs after the strike, I was a doorman's coil investigator – I was a DCI! So if they couldn't find a coil or sheets, I'd go and have a look. I was quite good at that. Have a look where it's supposed to be, and what was the last process, how big it is and all this, you know. I'd have a look through, I'd be walking through the marsh area (not marsh as in mud) that was the bay it was called, and then you'd hear the bell going. Sandra, get out of the way, the sheets are coming. OK, that's all right, because they're dangerous, the sheets are. If you've got the oiled sheets, if one goes off they come down like a pack of cards – you'd be a right mess like.

The coil just come off the dividing line was nice and warm, so you'd have a warm on that, this type of thing.

You did a lot of different things there.

Yes. Got to have variety, I can't stick with the same job.

There must have been enough of it for you to stay thirty years.

Yes. It was time to go, time to move on. They made me redundant. It worked out, because they gave me my redundancy, they said it was going to come up, but my dad died in the December (on my birthday) and mum fell in the January, so I had to have time off. I was in the offices then, ordering these thermo-meters. I had time off then, but I didn't go back because mum fell and really smashed her face up. By the time she got back on her feet, 'cause I wasn't living here then, I was living elsewhere, but it wasn't worth my going back. This was February, and I was finishing in March, I didn't go back. And Pauline finished the same time. So, while I was in the other office, I was working on the copying machine, a great big massive thing it was. You see them in this nine till five, paper flying everywhere, a bit like that.

So you were back to machines.

Yes, back to machines. I understand machines.

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

Yes, it was alright, because it's all a learning curve isn't it? You get the rum girls and the cheeky lads, that's life, you know. Just give them dirty looks if they say anything. Yes, it was ok. I didn't enjoy it in the offices, in one of the part of the offices. They got some nasty girls, and they're office girls like.

Factory life suited you?

Yes, 'cause I'm quite independent, to a degree anyway, but I don't like confrontations. I'll go along with it.

Well, I've asked all my questions. Is there anything you think I haven't asked, or covered?

No, I think I've mentioned everything that was coming to mind.

Thank you ever so much for sharing your memories with us.

Duration : 1 hour 30 minutes