

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

**Addis – Abertawe/Swansea, Miles Laboratories – Penybont/Bridgend**

**Interviewee:** VSE008 Yvonne Marie Morris  
**DOB:** 23/5/1946  
**Date:** 21/11/2013  
**Interviewer:** Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's Archive of  
Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru

**Part 1** VSE008.1.1

Yvonne Morris said that she was born in Antwerp in Belgium. Her father was stationed there with the South Wales borderers fighting the Germans through the war years. He met her mother there. Her dad was originally from Swansea so they moved back to Wales in 1955-6. She has one brother Brian who also lives in Barry.

01:15

She said she found primary education very difficult because she didn't speak a word of English to begin with. She failed her 11+ and went to Llansamlet secondary modern school and then Mynydd Bach multi lateral school for girls and studied shorthand & typing. She did reasonably well and went to do shorthand and typing training. Her brother being a year younger passed the 11+ and went to a grammar school and achieved a first class honours degree.

She left school at 16 and went to work as a shorthand typist for a few months. She was bored rigid and hated it. She did a variety of jobs - as a shop assistant, milliners, as a nanny - but couldn't settle to do anything. Eventually she thought she should get a steady job that paid reasonably well within a reasonable distance to home. So she got a job in Addis.

03:03

How did she feel about leaving school?

She wanted to leave school at the time and all her friends. They were expected to leave school and work for a while until they got married, but Yvonne knew that wasn't going to be the case for her. She didn't have a happy home life, she didn't get on with either of her parents, so the women she worked with became her substitute family. The women she formed the closest friendships with were old enough to be her mother. Working in Addis, she felt a sense of of close knit community.

04:43

What was the first day like?

The first thing that hit her was the size of the place and the second thing was the noise - everyone was yelling above the noise of the machines. Everything seemed grubby and dark as well.

She said "Although there were lots of lights on it still dark. Yeah - It was a bit awe inspiring walking in for your first day."

05:21

What did she do?

She started as a packer, working with plastic things for the home. They were timed so she had to do so many an hour on a line of women who were all doing packing. She found it physically hard but when she was young she was fit and strong. She didn't find the work boring, because she spent a lot of time talking to the people around her, so she switched off from what she was doing after a while. They also played music all the time.

06:58

She didn't know anyone who worked there when she went there to work, because she left all her friends behind. All her friends from Mynydd Bach went to university or worked in an office. She didn't choose Addis for any particular reason, just that it was close to home. She travelled to work on the bus with everyone else. They were public transport buses.

She was interviewed for the job. She had reasonably good qualifications from school and college and they seemed keen to have her. She worked on the telephone switchboard for a while. She'd trained to work on a switchboard. She did that when the telephonist was away, but then went back on to the factory floor and eventually began working on the machines which were quite dangerous although they had safety guards on. Then later on she trained other people to work on the machinery.

09:34

The machines trimmed the brushes to a standard size and attached the bristles to the plastic handles. She had to make sure the bristles were of a standard size so had to run a brush through a machine to cut the bristles which was done by hand. She doesn't remember having any special gloves or glasses, though they must have had safety glasses but she doesn't remember wearing them. The sharp little nylon bristles flew in all directions. All the machines had safety guards on and they were given good training on how to operate and they were constantly told to be careful and that the machines were dangerous. Considering that it was so long ago, she doesn't think it was so bad. They had several weeks' training.

11:14

They had a 15 min break in the morning, for a cup of tea or coffee and they sat down on the lines or wherever they were, when the hooter went. They had a staggered lunch break of 30 min. - 12.30 - 1, 1 - 1.30 etc. In the afternoon they had a break about 3pm and again sat down wherever they were for a drink and a 15 min break. There was a canteen and the food was very good.

12.30

The building was extremely hot because all the roofs were glass and when the sun shining it was extremely hot to work underneath it. Those were the only windows - there were no windows in the building. It was extremely cold in the winter. There were many occasions when they worked in their coats and scarves. They regularly had time and motion people visiting to see how fast or slow they were working and how many an hour would be a reasonable number to do, and it was almost always more than they thought they could manage so they had to speed up. Their visits were dreaded. The productivity expectations always went up never down, to increase the company profits obviously.

14:09

The first thing she did was to join the union - the TGWU. They used to have regular union meetings. On the whole they didn't have a lot of problems with them as employers because the pay rate was reasonable but it was the conditions that bothered them. The only disputes she remembers was in the winter when it was so cold that they had to work in their coats. The heating was never sufficient, the building was so huge that they were never aware of any heat. They complained about it but nothing was done. So they decided to go walk out on strike. She remembers them walking out en masse and being in the local paper, the Evening Post and also being on the local BBC Welsh news. Most of the workforce were members of the union. She didn't become an union official. She was too young and the shop steward was much older than her.

16:26

YM says that they made dish racks, cutlery trays, sink tidies, scrubbing brushes , sweeping brooms mops, anything that was used in the home that was made of plastic. She says she enjoyed some aspects of working at the factory, but as time went on she felt frustrated and thought she could be doing more with her life, she wasn't being stretched.

17:50

The workforce was made up of mainly women, hundreds of women. She doesn't remember there being any male employees except for the bosses, who were all male. The workers and supervisors were women. She then remembers that there was a workshop where they did the repairs and that was all male, but in all the time she was there she never went there. That would be considered skilled work, because they were the men who fixed the machines when they broke down. Working on the machines was skilled, because it took a lot more skill to work the machine than it took to pack an item. She says they were paid more to work on a machine.

19:16

"Your rate increased the longer you were there anyway. You got increments you know - they paid you for loyalty basically the longer you stayed.... Cause so many people left when they had children and stuff and then came back when their children were grown up quite often, so there was a big gap. So the pay increased with time spent and obviously if you were promoted to a supervisory position your rate went up"

20:04

YM went to work there in 1963, when she was either 16 or 17. She left school at 16 and none of her jobs lasted more than a few weeks before there. There were many married women working in the factory. There were no childcare facilities in the factory.

"O Good Lord not in 1963, it didn't even enter their thinking. There were women with children who were working there. How they coped I don't know cos they didn't even leave at 3 to pick up their children from school. So it must have been their mothers who did that, because they finished at 4 or 4.30 and that was long after the kids came home from school. No - that wouldn't have occurred to them in those days. You weren't encouraged to have time off even if your child was ill. That was tough. You had to come into work whatever. They kept a very keen eye on the number of days you took off sick. A lot of us used to have very painful periods. I was one of those who was usually in agony and standing when you had a painful period was not funny and I quite often used to end up in the sick room. We had a sick room and a nurse who worked there and would give you pills if the pain got too bad or you were even allowed to lie down for a bit if the pain got too bad and then when the pain wore off you had to go back on your machine - there was no question of you going home."

22:40

YM said that they were always tight on sick time and the person with the least sick time was praised very highly. She said that was easy for her because she had no family, she never took sick time but it was a different matter if you had children. But they were paid sick pay.

YM said she was earning £3/15/- as a shorthand typist. The pay in Addis must have been about the same. She was living at home and would give her mum some money, but she didn't ask for a great deal. She didn't leave home until she was in her 20s. She liked going to the cinema, so she would go a lot. She would buy clothes and a lot of record because she loved music. The music in the factory was from the radio, probably Radio 2 or then the Light Programme.

YM says they all wore overalls at work which they bought themselves, it wasn't provided for them. She thinks that some people complained that they weren't provided with company overalls.

YM remembers some injuries but they were minor. Nobody lost a finger or a hand. She remembers some people having ear protection if the machines were particularly noisy, but when she was packing, the machines were all around them and the noise was just as high but they weren't given ear protectors. She also says that they weren't keen on wearing them anyway because they were talking to each other all the time.

"It's what kept you sane, talking to other people and having a laugh, and you couldn't have heard them, so we wouldn't have worn them! I know many women in the past used to lip-read and that's what we would have done - we would have learnt to lip-read."

YM doesn't feel that she suffered any long term disability related to her work.

YM says that smoking was a massive issue. They weren't allowed to smoke on the factory floor and everybody wanted to smoke during their break and because they were on the factory floor it wasn't allowed. They all felt that they should have been allowed to go off to a specific room that was set aside for people who smoked or a specific room where they could take their sandwiches. So everyone would go to the toilet as often as they could get away with to have a quick fag in there. But often the supervisors would follow them in and double check that they weren't smoking. They had to say when they were going to the toilet and say when they were back. YM said that they had to make up that time that they spent in the toilet to make sure that they caught up with the number of packages.

YM said that they used to clock in the morning and clock out when they left. The supervisors used to sit with them on the factory floor and time their breaks. But the supervisors did have their own office where they could have their sandwiches and have a drink. Her relationship with the supervisors varied. Some were much nicer than others, more sympathetic with the work force and others were definitely not.

31:45

"I remember we had one from Scotland who was absolutely terrifying - everybody was scared of her, she was so strict . Then then we had a local girl who was absolutely lovely and he came to the loos with everybody and had a fag herself, which probably could have got her sacked. So you had a huge spectrum."

YM said some supervisors could be promoted from the factory floor and some came from outside. But she doesn't remember many promotions from the factory.

YM said that the factory workers weren't looked down upon by the community.

YM said that she worked 5 days a week and never did any overtime on weekends. She was never pressured into doing overtime but thinks that there must have been weekend work because the factory was open 7 days a week. She can't remember whether the days were from 7.30 - 4.30 or 8 to 4.30. She was aware of shift work but again didn't work shifts herself. She wasn't ever asked. As far as she can remember, they all finished at the same time. A mass of women would leave at the same time.

35:27

Ym says they had paid holidays - a fortnight a year. The factory didn't close down, they could request their holidays. They also had bank holidays.

YM says that they went back to Belgium with her family for their holidays every year and she didn't take independent holidays until she was much older - over 20 at least.

38:00

YM says that if anyone had a birthday or special event they all celebrated it together. Also at Christmas time they would have a 'works do' when they all went to a club together and celebrated with a Christmas meal. She can't recall the name of the club, but she says it's still there on the right as you drive into Swansea. It was near the factory which was situated in Pentrechwyth next to the river. You got off the bus in Bon-y-Maen and walked down a very steep hill. She's told the buildings are still there although the factory isn't operating any more. YM says that they had a nice meal and everyone got drunk. They tended to go to the same place for the birthdays, but sometimes they'd go to other pubs.

YM says that there was a great camaraderie between the women and they were close.

41:19

"Yes - we were all very tight. We were always aware of one another's private lives and issues that were going on with people's marriages and relationships and stuff."

YM she says that they remained good friends after she left the factory but when she started another job she didn't come across them very much unless you live very close to one another. She had one or two close friends that she continued to keep in touch with, but she hasn't been in touch with them since she left Swansea. Since most of her friends were 20 years or more her senior, she believes many of them would have died by now.

YM doesn't know how long she was at the factory. She left to work at a milliners. She then joined the army, but only did her basic training because during this time she met Margaret (her life partner.) She decided to buy herself out of the army and went back to Addis to work, she thinks for between 16 months to 2 years, until she eventually moved in with Margaret. When asked when she went back there she says it was the familiar, she knew the money was ok and she could do the job. She didn't enjoy the other jobs as much Addis. Because she was working with only one other person at the milliners and compared to working with a huge workforce she found it lonely.

45:39

YM talks a bit about working for the milliners.

46:55

YM talks about her reasons for joining the army.

47:55

YM talks about her sexuality and not 'coming out' in the factory.

YM "As far as the women (in the factory) were concerned it was something that they almost spat out as if it was something disgusting and dirty. If you told them you were gay, I suspect not many of them would have spoken to me or got anywhere close to me, in case it rubbed off on them by reputation. It was a very different atmosphere in the 1960s.... No I never discussed it with anyone."

49:51

YM Talks about her first relationship which happened when she was working in the factory.

52:46

YM went to work in Miles Laboratories Bridgend after moving to live with Margaret her partner. They used to bottle medicines on the line. YM there was a lot less camaraderie there and more focus on the work and less chat. The machines were a lot faster and they didn't have time to talk. The conditions however were very good. Extremely clean, extremely hygienic, good facilities, decent breaks, good money etc. The factory was quite large and again it was mainly women. YM worked there between '72 and '74.

YM said the social occasions were much more sophisticated and they all went into Cardiff. "It was a different world really."

54:36

YM says about her experience:-

"It was very formative in a way - I didn't realise it at the time, but it helped me get through some difficult years at home and I formed some very close relationships that helped me through difficult times."

CE " Generally for women were they (factories) important places?

YM "Everybody there felt that. It gave them a sense of independence and also a sense of who they were as individuals. Because most of them were married with families and everybody (outside the factory) related to them in that way - they were somebody's wife and somebody's mother, but while they were in the factories they were themselves, and you know they got back in touch with their identity and who they were. And they formed close relationships with other women and I think they were able to be themselves in a way that they probably weren't at home. It taught you a lot of things about yourself, forming relationships, being able to work as a member of a team, things like loyalty and I also learnt to be discreet because lots of people told you personal stuff which they trusted you with."

YM thought Addis were good employers for the time, considering it was the early 60s. She thought Mills were reasonable employers as well but you were expected to work hard.

**Part 2** From ID: VSE008.1.2

YM said the perks of working in the factory was that they were able to buy everything at cost price, but that they were randomly searched and repeatedly frisked every night when they left the factory. She said that if you were caught taking things from the factory, you were sacked. They weren't given the opportunity to do it a second time.

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD CYFWELIAD