

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIOAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

Fitzalan Place Sewing Workshop - Cardiff

INTERVIEWEE: VSE019 Pauline Moss

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INTERVIEWER: Amy Morris on behalf of Archif Menywod
Cymru/ Women's Archive of Wales

I was born in Glossop Terrace Hospital in Cardiff during the war, 1941. Um my mother was, um well she wasn't working at the time obviously because she, you know had given birth to me, um I'm actually not sure what my mother did before but my father was a miner, coal miner, um he worked underground, hard you know, very hard work all his life and um we lived with my mother's mother, my grandmother, after you know, after she brought me home. um when I was born in Glossop terrace hospital she told me that there was an air raid because they were bombing at the time during the war, and they used to take the children down into the cellar to protect the children, but they had sort of like arm bands. And when the children came back she said they gave her the wrong baby and she said uh, she complained about it and protested and eventually gave her me back. It's probably a mystery to this day if I was the right baby. but I think I am you know, cause I look in the mirror and see my mother anyway so yeah.

Where did you go to school?

I went to school, first of all when I went to school at three and a half, I went to Abertridwr infants and that's another, that's a story again I don't know if you're interested in all this or whether you can probably edit what you don't need afterwards but I, uh, at three and a half my grandmother lived almost around the corner from Abertridwr school in Thomas Street. And she was lovely my grandmother, I loved my grandmother, and um when I started school as soon as I started I put this plan in my head That I was going to, not go home for the dinner hour. I was going to walk through the gates, I planned it in my mind, Through the gates, turn left walk up the street, down right and there she was. So for a week, week and a half I planned this in my mind and this day I was going, I'm definitely going. So I goes through the gate, down the road, turned left and I thought 'I didn't think this road was this long' I just got stuck and started to cry and this lady took me in and she gave me a plate of chips that were the whitest chips I'd ever seen in my life, then my mother arrived she must have sent for my mother, and here was my mother with a turban on, as they used to wear in those days and I can remember her not being very happy about it you know but I planned it all and I was going you know

03:38 *Wonderful, did you go to secondary school?*

I went to secondary school then in Senghennydd, cause we moved up to Senghennydd because my father was allocated, um, through the colliery house and we lived in number 15 Alexandra Terrace in Senghennydd and the school was just down the lane from us, and the uh senior school was behind, just behind us so it was only a matter of just walking down the lane to the school you know, but there was a girls school and a boys school at the time. the boys school was behind our house and the girls school was just down the lane, course when they become secondary schools then, they amalgamated the boys and the girls together, which was sort of like late really, I think we were about nine or ten, when we, you know cause we were just solely girls schools then and um, I wasn't lucky enough to um go to the grammar school, I uh just stayed in school until I was fifteen so, yeah.

What did you, uh, did you have any brothers or sisters?

I had a sister, her name was Aileen and um she died unfortunately, she um, she ah, she was 41, 48 when she died so was quite young

What did your sister do?

She was, she had quite a good job actually, she worked in the courts in Cardiff, um she was uh, you know some sort of secretary she would sit in on court cases and things like that you know, which was quite good.

Very interesting

Yeah very interesting.

interesting stuff, wonderful okay um you say you left school when you were fifteen?

yes

I know from a conversation with Catrin that you then went out to work in Cardiff?

Yeah, I left school on the Friday at 15, and um there was a little boy I knew in school, his name was Phillip McDoodle, he was just a little boy but he would follow me around everywhere and um his father apparently used to have alterations done in the um tailor shop and he knew of two jobs going, so um my mother said 'oh well she can go there' and my friend Rowena Opie came with me and we took the two jobs and uh, that's more or less how we got there but the workshop in Cardiff was in Fitzalan Place, It was just like a house, a bay windowed house you know with the long hallway and the rooms set off then, you know the um the room where the machines were was in the bay window part and then the other part was where they finished, you know finished off and things like that you know there was different girls in there and we were in the machinery part but we started off we had to, when we uh arrived in work we had to lay the fire to light the fire in the morning, it was a coal fire so that meant taking up the ashes and putting the ashes out and then setting the fire and lighting it, which we were protesting to cause you know we wanted to come and learn how to be tailloresses you know?

Yeah

We did get there eventually but I remember a little, uh an old lady was sat there um, right by the fire, I think she was one of the finishers as well, and she was, to me she was really really old and her name was Gladys Loose. I often wonder about her now, she's probably dead and gone you know, but the other girl, the other Gladys was the bosses wife's sister and she was watching over us and you know, telling us what to do next and we started off like, machining,

well first of all showing us how to use the machines and then we started off, um uh, doing hems and zips and things and then um you know we progressed then to sort of doing lapels and um, it was quite good really because in the stages that we were, well I was because Rowena finished there and she was going to work in a, in her father, her uncle's shop which was at the edge of the street. There's um terraces this side, that we called the four terraces, there's four of them, she was in the last one, a shop at the end of the street and um she decided to go work there. but I was still there and I progressed then to come the other side of the table next to Gladys, because I was going to learn the make the flap things that went over the pockets. It was quite good quality things that we made you know because we would work with Harris tweed that was, you know very nice and a lot of famous people would come in, I remember the um, the like the old rugby player I think was Phil something, he had dark hair, a bald head but dark hair, I don't know whether it was Phil Williams I can't remember now and I remember them all saying it was Phil Williams that had come in and there was a mister Cohen that would come in, of course there is loads of Cohens now in Cardiff isn't there, we used to make stuff for him as well. And then Phyllis who was... Tom Giles was the Boss - Phyllis was his wife, she was a nice lady, quiet. She would sit in the other room around this table sort of finishing off, there was this other girl called Annette Catherelly (?) and her father worked for Asteys Cafe in Cardiff. Asteys Cafe used to be right by the bus station and uh he worked there and um there was another girl called Joan Harding, she used to say Joan Harding, she she'd name her single name all the time you know, and you know quite a few others that I can't remember their names now but I remember those two you know, Phyllis and Gladys and Tom Giles you know, um Tom Giles looked like um... he's on the television, I can't remember his name now cause it's so old but he looked like him and he had a caravan then in um near Llandocho, near um...

Penarth?

No not Penarth, Llan something,.. he had a caravan down there anyway I used to think he was very posh cause he had a caravan, you know, and we went to see the caravan. But of course when I first started they would um tease me because it was really odd but his sister, Tom Giles's sister, why he was called Tom Giles I don't know cause she was called Whitaker and she married a fella that was from Abertridwr and his name was Phil Duffy and sometimes he'd come downstairs cause he lived in the flat above and he'd tease me asking me if I'd come out of my cave this morning and what was it like in the cave and that and I was so young I didn't know, I used to think 'I dunno what you mean' You know, I, What do they mean about a cave and of course there was a pub then in Aber, well it's still there 'The Royal' and that had a reputation, and I was only fifteen he'd say 'oh you up the Royal last night up to your antics'. And I'd think I wasn't allowed up the pub, I wasn't even allowed out of the street, that's the thing I had never gone out of the street before and here I was plonked in Cardiff working in the workshop you know.

11:41 How long did it take you to get to work?

On the train it was like quarter of an hour twenty minutes really, but then we would finish and half past five, dead on half past five, and Rowena and I would try and catch the twenty five to six train home and we'd run, you know there is a bridge now as you come to Fitzalan place because we were right opposite the blind institute you know, and we'd run right under the bridge, we'd run so fast and the train would go over you know if we missed the train we'd have to wait for the ten to six train you know

Did you um, Did you enjoy working there?

I did enjoy it yes because, the simple reason because if I had stayed, because I was head prefect in school, if you were head prefect in school you would get the opportunity to work in the local post office which had a switch board then you know where you'd put all the plugs in, and um I thought, well I could either go to the post office or work in the workshop in Cardiff, my mother chose where I was going to work down there, probably because it was more money anyway and I'm really glad because if I had stayed in Senghennydd I would've been a little bit more narrow than I am, working in Cardiff it just opens you up to being in a city you know because if I couldn't find my way around then I could after working there because they sent me out for a roll of material one time, um too um I forget the names of the places, where I went in Cardiff I don't know because I have no idea where this place is, I got on the bus, the bus driver said, um the conductor said he would show me where it is but he didn't so I must have been on the bus half of the day I had no idea where I was and I must have got back about half past three in the afternoon they were all wondering where I'd been, then I started to cry I had no idea where I was so for that alone taught me how to get around the place. you know so yes I am glad I worked there because I think I would have been a little bit old fas-- not that people, you know what mean, there is this little bit of narrowness in the valleys you know it's okay keep to what you know in the past its just nice to have a broader mind as well you know

Yeah

So yeah I did enjoy it. I enjoyed the company

Did you have to have an interview to get that job? how did it happen?

I don't think so, I think we were just introduced to Tom Giles and that was it you know, you'd just start work you know, I think if I can remember we had to go down and see him first then we were to start on the Monday you know, if I can remember correctly but that was it, no sort of strict interview or you know 'how many A levels have you got?' or anything, cause you know I didn't have any.

14:50 Did you already know how to do the things you were expected to do?

Well yeah we were taught sort of to you know sow and stuff like that but um, and my mother bought me a thimble, a brass thimble and some scissors but I don't know where the scissors have gone I've still got the thimble, the brass thimble It doesn't fit on my finger I was tiny.

So what did you, what did you do? can you describe what you did on an average work day for me?

An average working day would start off on the machines sewing zips in, you'd get to like, if you wanted a buttonhole done there'd be a young lady on a huge machine opposite and you'd have to give the material to her for the buttonhole to be put in. when you'd finished you'd say 'buttonhole' when you'd finished doing zips and sewing the seams of trousers and things like that you know. like straight sewing more or less, then you'd progress to doing the more intricate things like flaps on the pockets and stuff like that and linings and things.

While you were there at the factory did you change jobs or swap jobs or anything?

No still in the same job, it was just ah, more or less like um ah you know when they teach people, what's it called an apprenticeship really, like I said I progressed then to doing all of the intricate work and things like that, that's when I finished because we were uh getting married then you know.

When you got married did you stay there?

I did have the opportunity of going back actually and um I was still quite young, I had our eldest daughter then and I just wanted to bring her up you know, thinking back on it it probably wasn't a good idea, I should have gone back really but there we are, that's that I chose and that was it you know.

How old were you when you left and got married and had your daughter?

I was nineteen, I was twenty, twenty one when I had our eldest daughter, I married quite young really.

When you were there did you remember any working mothers or staff on the floor?

Pauline: No, No I don't think any of them had children, no I don't think so, Annette never mentioned any children, they were, you know they were all older than me but still quite young you know and Gladys wasn't married.

While you were there, you said it's like an apprenticeships, did your employers every encourage you to do outside training?

No no nothing like that, you just sat and did your work where you were you know.

Learnt your craft

Except sending me out for the rolling material.

18:08 How much did they pay you when you first started?

You know I can't remember now if it was ten pounds or ten shillings I can't remember, you know ten shillings was a lot of money then in the fifties, It could have been if it was ten pounds it was a hell of a lot of money you know.

Yeah what year did you actually start working then?

Pauline: I started work in nineteen fifty four and I was married then in nineteen fifty nine so it was like four years really, it wasn't that long.

Did your wages stay the same for those four years?

Yeah

Was it weekly?

Weekly yeah in a little brown packet.

Okay, did you know how much other people were earning?

I had no idea no, no I didn't know I just assumed everyone was earning the same you know, just assumed that

What did you do with your wages?

My mother had them, and she paid my train fare and if I wanted to go out, for sort of clothes and like that, you know that is what you worked for in those days, you handed everything over, just keeping yourself more or less you know.

It went to the family?

Yeah, there was nothing left over for luxuries of anything, you never had luxuries you know.

Was there a trade union at your factory that you knew of?

No, never, never knew of any trade union.

Did you have to wear a uniform?

No, no sometimes Gladys used to look at me cause I used to dye my hair very very blonde, if um, if the roots were showing I'd say to my mother you know you have to do them again, but I'd brush it through you know so it would just get blonder and blonder. I remember going in one morning and Gladys looked up at me and went 'oh my god'. you had to look like Diana Dors in those days you know.

The work that you did, was it dangerous at any time?

Oh I stuck the needle through my finger at one time but surprisingly enough it doesn't hurt because it just goes through and that's it you know.

Did you go home with throbbing hands after your first week?

No no, it was so, actually it didn't hurt, its amazing really. just a straight needle in.

Well it sounds very painful. were there any rules? you know now we have health and safety and if there's an accident you have to fill in a book, fill in lots of forms, were there any regulations?

No, no, you weren't even told 'be careful of this, be careful of that, just try not to get the needle stuck in your finger you know.

Just watch out, were there facilities at the factory? toilets changing rooms?

There was a toilet down the long corridor and there was a backyard, sometimes lunchtime we would go out in the backyard you know, when hula hoops were popular you know all of us would be doing the hula hoop out in this backyard there.

What about smoking? were people allowed to smoke while they were working?

I don't remember anyone smoking in the workshop, I don't.

They would have to go out during break?

Yeah

Did you have break times, how many did you have?

We had break times yeah, we'd sit and have a cup of tea and have a chat around the fire you know, it was like a little front room and we'd sit and chat around the fire. we did go out on one occasion, because I think this little park is now down the bottom of Fitzalan place near where the prison is, we walked down there one day and sat and had our lunch but not, we wouldn't go out very often you know, just chat around the fire.

Would they play any music? have the radio on?

Yes we had the radio on, Gladys used to like Ella Fitzgerald and so did I, she was very keen on Ella Fitzgerald, Tom used to like those sorts of music as well, it was good we used to have the radio on.

22:55 Were there any shows you used to look forward to listening to?

No no, but we did go, we had a Christmas trip to go to the opera in the park, we had dinner in the Park Hotel and we went to the New Theatre then to see, was it Die Fledermaus and um it was two operas, I have never been to the theatre before, only to the cinema in Senghennydd, I thought it was wonderful to go to the Park Hotel and everything. and I remember I stayed with my friend Sheila, Sheila Coulsens (?) who used to sit on the next machine after Rowena and she lived in Splott where the tide (tyre?) fields are, we used to all say she lived by the

tide fields I remember I stayed the night with her on that occasion when we went to the theatre, and we became quite good friends me and Sheila, we keep in touch, she lives in Cwmbran, no Blaenafon now and uh her husband was a policeman but then he's converted to being a vicar, so she's a vicar's wife now.

Quite a change, must have seen a lot as a policeman

Yeah, I know that's right.

Were there any men? you mentioned one already, one fella that worked with you, were there any others?

No Tom was it, Tom Giles was the boss. No-one else. Phil Duffy would come down from upstairs to tease us all you know but no it was only Tom and he was the tailor and his table was behind our machines,, long table and he'd be cutting out the materials, cutting out the trousers and suits and jackets you know, it'd be sleeves and things, yeah

Did any of the female workers, yourself included, get to help out with his work as well?

No it was only Tom who would do that yeah.

How many hours did you work?

I worked from... we'd catch the ten to eight train to get into work by half past eight then leave at half past five, then I think it was like, we'd have a ten o'clock break and an hour lunch then, I forget if we had an afternoon lunch now but then we'd leave dead on half past five.

Did you ever get offered overtime?

No we'd never get overtime no.

Did you ever take holidays? did they do that when you worked?

You know that's another thing I can't remember, I'm sure we did but I can't remember.

Did you ever have any away days? you said you went to the opera but did you have any work away days?

No never, I know they all went to France at one time and they wanted me to go but I knew I couldn't afford to go. So I didn't go, they brought back some lovely photographs of them all in the sunshine you know I remember that, I wish I had gone then you know.

26:30 Did you have any holidays with your family you know, when you worked?

No no we never had holidays

Things like sick leave, did you have sick leave if you were poorly?

Yes yeah we had that. but you needed a sick note from the local doctor, I don't know what they do now. not sure what they do now is it the same process?

I think you can self-certify but after a week you need a doctors certificate, not dissimilar. I've spoken to you about social activities, did you have any other social activities?

No no only messing about you know, with hula hoops and chatting about things

So you've already told me that afterwards you were a wife and mother, you spent your time bringing up your daughter, did you have any other children?

Later on yeah my youngest daughter Jane that was in 1964 Jane was born. I did have a miscarriage in between that but ah Jane was born then normally and um then I worked in the

local school then doing a bit, well my mother was the school cleaner but to um earn my keep more or less I was able to help in the school you know so we'd go and help, cause you know it was quite hard work in those days it was like a scrub floorboards then, it was quite hard work, brass handles and you know Graham says to me sometimes 'oo that's a nice brass' and I say don't bring me any more brass, I've seen enough brass cleaning and then of course then when Steph grew up and went to school I went as a dinner lady, still a school cleaner and it was quite hard work, then um I had a lovely soft job then, I worked in the local surgery then for quite a while but um it was sort of like doing three jobs because I was a school cleaner which was a morning thing, then dinner lady and I lived down here then and school was at the top of the hill so I was walking back and forth three times a day for that and then the surgery asked me to help out, I stayed for a year or two years but it all got a bit much for me then so it was either give up one or the other, out of the choices I would've liked to have kept the surgery but the um the county was looked, looked after you then you paid in your (something?) and there was that to consider so I decided to stay doing the school cleaning and stuff.

29:39 With the skills you were taught at the factory um I don't think I've asked what it was called?

It was called Whitakers...or Giles, It didn't have a sort of like name you know, there wasn't a brand name on the jackets or anything, we just made high class jackets.

Did you ever continue to use those skills outside of the factory?

I didn't have to but I used to make little dresses for the girls and things you know but no I didn't bother with any of it afterwards you know I think Rowena did she used to make a lot of her own clothes and things, nothing professionally though. you know I can hem my own and do things for myself but I never bothered for anyone else.

Did they used to supply to big stores or was it just people coming in off the street?

Yes they um they, obviously Cohens used to come in, whether he came in for a batch of stuff for his store or just for personal things, I know the rugby players used to come in for blazers, they wore their blazers. I know we used to do a lot for the electric board at that time, like black or navy surge with the logo thing on you know, that's what I can remember you know.

Like uniforms?

Yes yeah.

So you were one of the seamstresses, what other roles were there at the factory? Was there someone to handle the money?

Well Tom did all that he had his little office in the back there, he did all that, when anyone came like Mr Cohen he would greet them and take them to the office but yeah Tom dealt with all the orders and money, wages for people and things.

Was there a cleaner or anything like that?

i have no idea, when we finished work we'd run for the train and that would be it. that would be the day finished you know I dunno we'd sweep up because there would be bits of cotton everywhere so we would clean up[, I got no idea about a cleaner, we used to clean the ash up, the ash out of the grate and the fire and everything. I don't think there was a cleaner to be truthful, we would do it all.

And how many do you think actually worked there?

There was a girl called Julie, there was Phyllis, Julie, Annette, Gladys and Joan Harding that's four isn't it, there was Gladys and the girl on the button-holer machine, I can't remember her name, there was me and Sheila and Gladys so there would be eight or nine

33:03 So nice and small?

Oh very small yeah you know, exclusive really but it was hard to say anything because the Blind Institute would be right opposite so quite often you would be staring out the window trying to see somebody because they made different baskets and things then didn't they? And I often wondered what they actually did really I just thought it was an institute where blind people went for some sort of medication not realising they were making different things

Oh I didn't realise they were making things there

Yeah like baskets I think, shopping and laundry baskets and things. As far as I know you know, yeah it's still there.

It's got a shop now I think, for things that help people with partial sightedness

Oh is it? Because on the site of our house, our shop there's the Hodge Building, is it a hotel or something now. The rest of the street is there but it's just our workshop they took up so it's gone now all together.

When you look back over those four years how do you feel about the time you spent working there overall?

A bit nostalgic actually, very often I dream I'm back there with the girls. I do feel a bit nostalgic about it, I often wonder where they all are now you know, where they are and what they are doing now. I know Phyllis and Tom are gone now, and Gladys. But I often wonder about the others.

Do you know when it actually got closed?

Well when they built the Hodge Building, well no but I um imagine it wasn't there a long time before that. It might have still been a workshop but I don't think so, Tom passed away but it might have been carried on as a workshop.

By someone else yeah, need to make sure there is nothing I need to ask you, oh that's right, did you ever have Christmas parties?

I can't remember ever having one now, I can't remember ever doing that.

Okay I think we are done, thank you

Oh well that was painless, you're welcome.

36:20

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD