

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

Kayser Bondor, Pentre-bach c. 1952-60; Kayser Bondor / Courtaulds, Dowlais c. 1960- ?83; Chard's, London; A.B. Metals, Abercynon; Kayser Bondor; Barton's; Forma (1988-1995)

Interviewee: VSE025 Mair Richards

Date: 27/01/14

Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of Women's Archive of Wales

Mair Richards confirmed her name and address and gave her date of birth as 6th March, 1935. Her background **'My father was in the First World War, from which he never really recovered, so I don't remember him ever working, because his chest was terrible'** She notes that most of the men were gassed in the war. Her mother – she doesn't recall her working either – she stayed at home and looked after her father most of the time. She had two sisters, (both dead now) Nance – oldest, Lillian next, then a brother was born (before Mair was born) but he died when he was three and a half - he had meningitis which was common in those days. **'The only thing my mother would say was that she was glad in a way, because he would have gone to the Second World War.'** Then she was born in 1935. As a family they lead a quiet life. She did have aunties and uncles and her mother was forty when she was born. These were all old and died off. She had one aunt who lived to her nineties, and she lived quite near. She had a few cousins who have all moved away or are gone now.

She went to the local Twynrodyn Infants' School (now gone), until she was 11 when she sat the scholarship. Then she went to Merthyr County Grammar School for about 4 years. But at that particular time her father's health was getting much worse and her mother wasn't all that marvellous either, so ... **'really speaking, she wasn't very keen about it, but I mean I had to go to work, because he had very little money, which you can imagine, to live on, in those days.'** Her mother nursed him but there was no help in the house, and when her mother died, **'I nursed him and went to work.'** She'd never heard of 'social'.

3.45

Their doctor in Merthyr was a young man called Dr Hamilton – 'lovely man he was' – and he used to come to see her every day in the week in a lunch time at one o'clock, because he knew she would be home from work. **'I used to go home from Kaiser Bondor to be with**

my father for that short time, and he would always come in the dinner time ... to talk to him.' Her father talked to him as if he was about ten (years old)! Her father was ? with tablets because her mother had waited on him hand and foot. Well, she couldn't really do that. She felt she was really hard done by – everybody else seemed not to have such responsibilities, **'but you did in them days, didn't you?'**

She left school when she was about fifteen and a half. Then she went to work in W.H.Smiths for about a year. It was quite nice. **'I enjoyed it in there – nice people working there, you know, but the money was terrible ... £1 2 6. It didn't go far even in those days.'** But though her father was in bad health, he was a marvellous gardener so they never had anything bought from a shop. Her mother was old-fashioned and made her own bread, jams and made Mair's clothes more or less. **'So I was better off than thousands, actually.'**

5.50

She would have liked to have stayed on in the grammar school **'but it wasn't possible'**. Then she went to work down in Kaiser Bondor and she wasn't there long before her mother died. She was seventeen in March and her mother died in April. **'When you look back over a lot of years you think to yourself "Well, you did have help in lots of ways, really, if it was only the doctor."'** She compares this with today! He'd started as a young doctor down in Pentre-bach and her mother was one of his first patients. He was terrible when her mother passed away. She had a brain haemorrhage and there was nothing he could do (the story of her mother's illness).

'I suppose when you think about it, these things are meant to happen, aren't they?' At the time she didn't have time to dwell on it. Later, when her older sister died, she was more upset.

She moved to Kaiser Bondor because of **'money'.. 'I had about £3 5shillings.'** It was a difference of at least £2 a week - a lot of money. And a lot of her friends were working in Kaiser's anyway.

10.00

She had an interview for the job. She was interviewed by the Personnel Officer because she wasn't going in in a batch, but singly. One of the girls had asked whether there were any jobs available, **'which there were in those days'**, and she had already been to KB once, when she was still at school. **'When I went and told my mother that I had a job in Kaiser Bondor, ... she was ashes over the hedge you know, "Go to a factory to work - all these women with cigarettes and turbans on their heads (like the war see!)"** And I said **'It's not like that Mam, it's lovely.'** **"I don't care what it is, you're not going to no factory. Stay in school"**. But her mother wasn't very well then. She wanted to get a job herself – it was not because of her parents. Quite a few of her friends were working in Bondor and they had money, not much, ... **'Well, I didn't have that. So I mean, I wanted to leave school. Neither of them were very pleased'**. She didn't realise then that she would have had to stay

at home anyway to look after her father. Her eldest sister was married and living in Coventry and her husband wasn't in good health – he had a marvellous job in Rolls Royce but he had lung problems – TB.

With her wage of £3 5s. **'I kept the house going'**. Before her mother passed away she gave most of the money to her mother, **'of course. And you'd have about 5 shillings then – pocket money – which was wonderful. 'Cos before that I was going to work and not getting anything at all.'**

In the interview they asked where she worked before and you had to do a little test. **'They had little wooden blocks that were cut out you know, you had to put on a - you can imagine, I thought to myself "I don't believe this" ... there were these oblongs and triangles and they were all on the board, and you had to put the one in the right one, you know. How on earth it was possible not to put it in, I just don't know! But there we are – so I passed with flying colours.'**

13.08

On her first day she went straight into the cutting room. The first day was **'lovely'**. The factory itself was **'beautiful, gorgeous.'** It had been pleasant working in Smiths' – it was in town and she knew two of the girls, who had been in school with her – older than her (and still alive). When she went down to Kaiser's she knew everybody down there practically, loads - all from down here – the bottom of the town – they lived quite close to the factory. A couple of her friends used to ride to work on a bike. She went on the bus. Kaiser's was dead opposite the Hoover factory. **'It was massive, beautiful factory, spotless – you could eat off the floor, because they would be round every day with these big industrial cleaners, you know, cleaning everything everywhere ... and you couldn't eat sweets, and you couldn't wear clips or anything like that in your hair, you also couldn't have your hair hanging down, so it was a bit of a problem if you had long hair, you had to tie it in a knot. (laughs) 'Cos we had this manageress called Miss Rummy? who was a wonderful woman, but she was a real manageress you know – very fair and she could do everything. I don't know about the cutting room – I never saw her in there. But she could do all the machining,'** - she could do the work better than the girls on the machines.

Mair went straight into the cutting room. But **'to be perfectly honest with you I mean, it wasn't a big deal.'** She learnt things as she went along. **'The men cutting, the men always did the cutting.'** She was trained with another girl – they were laying up the fabric together on the tables, there were long, long tables and big rolls of fabric and you lift them on to the machine then and lay it up properly. **'They used to come and have a pencil to make sure that the laying edge, as they called it, was dead straight, like that, couldn't move to the right or to the left or lean over, nothing, because when the markers went on, they were really tight, 'specially in those days.'**

16.50

The markers were long rolls of paper – Margaret used to do the marking, and she would have patterns and you'd put the patterns on the top, very, very tight. There were all different sizes on a marker and you'd have 10 to 12s and 20 to 22s together in a certain area because one would fit in better with the other, without losing any cloth. Sixteen eighteens always went together, because the fabric was a certain width – from 36 inches wide in those days – she thinks the widest they used to do in those days down in Pentre-bach was about 54 (inches) or even a bit wider – 60 was the widest, 'cos the tables were long wooden tables and then you had a machine on the table which you pushed back and fore, so you were putting the cloth down one on top of the other. When she was in Bondor and they were using very fine fabrics they might put perhaps a hundred layers down, and the marker would go on top of it and the cutters would cut round it. **'And us girls had to put each of the pieces together'**.

And there would be what was called a 'bulk feed' – sometimes you had a slip in the Bondor with six panels on it. Well you had six panels of every size, and you had to put them back together then in the bulk feed and that would go out to the machine room and each girl who was doing a different operation – she'd be taking them off. It all depended on what everyone was doing. Some girls had like a clothes horse and they'd have their work on there, for what they were doing, **'because they would be doing hundreds of them'**. Different sewing machines did different operations – they didn't make the whole garment. One of the sewing machines was ... an ordinary sewing machine turned on its end – so that the needle was going back and fore in front of you. The mechanics used to make these actual machines for them. Mair describes one machine. There were over lock machines, - once the nylon came in the over lock was sufficient. **'If you were using rayon, like years ago they used to, that had to be French seamed'**. She explains the process – called 99 something - her friend did this all the time – she'd be doing that all day.

21 20

The factory used to make everything – all underwear – lingerie down in Pentre-bach. They didn't make clothing – they did start to make children's things, **'more trouble with that than the worth of it. Housecoats'**.

After being in Bondor she went to London to work - making shirts.

They made night clothes – the full range of lingerie – housecoats, nightdresses, half-slips, petticoats of all descriptions, briefs of all descriptions. Hundreds of colours, - shades - **'That was another thing we had to do, 'cos when the rolls were there we had to make sure they were all the same shades going down otherwise, because you'd take work from the top end of the table and work from there with the right numbers on, on the marker, but it would mean it would fit, ... cos the colours wouldn't fit. ... You had to make sure that you finished off in the same place all the time.'** **'There would be about 20-30 shades of pink, and all the other colours, and sometimes, believe you me, it used to be a real horrendous mess. That's what I mean, if things are not done right, in the cutting room to go on to the machine line, ...(?)'**.

So she was laying up the cloth, hand cutting, she did a lot of hand cutting, perhaps if something had gone wrong, or **‘what we used to do to save time, was we used to put a marking – cos fabric isn’t all perfect – there’s ladders in it, there’s all sorts of things in it, so we’d mark them with tape, that had been cut out of another lay, we’d keep it for that, and then when the work was cut, say it was about three inches high, you’d see all the tapes, and I used to do a lot of that work. I used to take them out, put a re-cut in, in the right shade, put it back then, that was right, correcting all the recuts before they went out, otherwise the girls would be there forever.’** She learned that on the job. It depended how you got on with the shears and things. **‘I just loved it – everything about it.’** **Only men did the cutting with the machines.**

Why only men?

‘Why are places in those days only men? And when I went to Forma after Kaiser’s I was cutting all the time. But it was different machinery, see – big presses and things like that for bra work.’ They did cut some things on tables in Forma because they did do half-slips there, but all the bra work was done on the big press. They also made cami-tops and half-slips, but no nightdresses – there wasn’t enough room there. When she first went to Forma she found it strange in her mind that there were only two tables 3-4 metres long in that cutting room after working in Bondor where you’d have five tables, and two cutting departments in Pentre-bach because there was so much work - thousands. **‘And in Dowlais we had five tables all thirty metres long. ... but of course when you’re doing bra work it’s all small isn’t it? If you put three metres of a lay down with bra work you’d have three thousand garments.’**

27.00

Unsure how many worked in Pentre-bach factory – hundreds. Mostly they were all women but the mechanics were men – they kept the machines working, one or two electricians, the only men on the machines were the cutters in the cutting room – at the height of activity there were about 4-5 cutters – that’s all they did, they didn’t have anything to do with the fabric, **‘they wouldn’t know where to start. It was just put in front of them and they cut. It was massive mass production really for lingerie ... there were huge orders, cos we weren’t only working for Kaiser, most of it was for Kaiser, ...but we did do sometimes for Marks and Spencers, ... they were quite big orders, and especially when we went to Dowlais. When we went to Dowlais, it was a different ball game altogether, because it wasn’t Kaiser any more although it was using the name and the tabs and everything, ‘cos Courtaulds had taken everybody over then, so they were dealing with everybody.’** They were working for M&S - all the people who sell things like that – Debenhams, and there was still a tremendous amount of work. And then they were doing a lot of housecoats – for abroad, **‘We always used to say when we had our order for Germany with the housecoats, – “Oh my God!” because they were all big women. These German Fraus - they started about size 18.’** They went all round and they were heavy to handle. Then we used to do a lot of XXX? work and they were going under the Kaiser name. **‘When we went**

into the housecoats in Dowlais that was a lot more complicated work. But in the meantime I'd been to Chard's in London so I'd had a lot of experience in that – for matching and all that sort of thing – men's shirts. '

30.10

She liked working in Kaiser Bondor. **'Lovely, I loved working there. It was interesting.'** Though her parents were not very happy everyone else was alright because **'everyone worked in Kaiser Bondor in Merthyr'**. At least down the bottom of the town. There were buses coming down from Dowlais, and buses from over the valley in Rhymney – there were a lot of people working there. There were quite a lot in Dowlais too, because **'Dowlais was silk stockings as we used to call it – nylon, and there were huge machines, taking up a tremendous amount of room. Only one or two men operating each one, they used to call them the knitters, because that was what they was doing – very fine work.'** When it started to go down a bit then, mostly with the lingerie, because they had a lot of space up in Dowlais and apparently (though she's not sure how true it is) they owned the building in Dowlais, which they didn't in Pentre-bach, which was one of those factories after the war – like Hoover's was. **'So we all moved up to Dowlais in 1960. We did a lot more work up there in the way of ... bed-jackets, and anything in that range then, which was nice – it was interesting. Some of the fabrics were terrible to handle, you know, they were so fine, and I mean you would be putting it down on the table and it would be floating! When Renee used to work with me, I used to say "Sorry Ren, we've got another floaty lay come in." She'd go "Oh no, I'm going home, I can't stand it!" ... Then we went into quilting in a big way then, so they opened up another area up there, which was already there, ... they had quilting machines making the quilts. And then we used to lay up the quilt for the dressing gowns in quilting, see? They were nice.'**

There wasn't a lot of difference between going up to Dowlais and Pentre-bach. It was all moved with very little upset – there was plenty of unused space to bring the things from Pentre-bach up – the basics were there already, so they didn't have to stop working. It all went off quite easily really.

They did go up a couple of times before they actually moved up to work, to be shown around. The Dowlais factory is still there – it just looked like a factory on the outside – bricks, but inside it was all newly painted, spotlessly clean, all the racks were ready for the work to go on to. Like Pentre-bach it was kept immaculately clean with the industrial cleaners – huge vacuum cleaners with one woman working on each. They spent all day long doing nothing else except going around, because there was a lot of dust, in the cutting room especially. The factory looked **'beautiful. It had hangers everywhere for the long garments and they were all in plastic bags,'** They had machines that could be pulled down to cover the garment – all in rows. There were people called packers and they packed everything (nothing was out in the open air) - once the work was completed. It all went into different areas, ready to go from packing into the dispatch. There were a few men working in the dispatch in Dowlais.

Then they'd be sent out. **'It was all very organised in Pentre-bach and Dowlais. Suited me lovely, because I love organisation.'**

35.48

Once in Pentre-bach, because we used to do all these different things, you know, when you said about the Aberfan, well, we had the wax around the work was put on to, when it was ready waiting to go on out to the ... all had big dark green thick, linen curtains, you'd pull them aside then when you were taking the work out, ... and after the Aberfan disaster, the following St David's Day, we decided, we took it upon ourselves now, to make capes, because we had the white linen, the white cotton, and I used to keep all the remnants, ... the white cotton and the cotton you know on reels, that could be used for the ... mmm... roots (on the bottom of the leek). Ken Stevens was our boss then, and I said to Ken, "Excuse me Ken," He said, "What do you want love?" I say "We want a curtain." He said "You want a curtain? What do you want a curtain for?" I said "Well, one curtain will make thousands of leeks, ... so if we have the end one, I can put a seam on that, and move it along and it won't matter because (they weren't straight flat curtains, they were, you know, ooosh like) ... I said "You're not going to miss one curtain, are you?" And he said, "No". "Thank you", I said, so we took the curtain off now, ... it was about five metres in length, and about six foot high. .. We did all this in our break time, mind, and we were taking them home as well, to do things in the house. Somebody made the roots, and I don't know how much money we made. ... Selling them to everybody in work and out of work, ... there was a little pin on them, nothing posh – a pin .. about three –four inches altogether, and that was to raise money for Aberfan.' They raised a lot of money – hundreds and hundreds of pounds. They even took them to the toilets for a wee, you couldn't go on your own, you had to take one to do – 2-3 at a time, because **'we had to get them done. In the end we were all going, "whose idea was it to make all these leeks?"'** They had all these marks around their fingers from making them! She was cutting strips out by hand, **'you can imagine!'** Once they started – they had to carry on doing things. They had cotton wool once to decorate their bosses' ? office. He'd lost a child in the Aberfan. At Christmas time (his office was in the corner), we said **"What we'll do now, we'll decorate all the office, to cheer him up now"** – and, we used to do all this in our break,' (by now her father had passed away and she was married) **'and in the lunchtime we'd be making all cotton wool balls now, and taking them out in the toilet, to dye in the both, and we used to say "Nobody to use the two end sinks, because .."** You'd never believe the things we used to get up to! We dyed all the cotton wool balls and we decorated all the office and we made a Santa Clause out of paper and everything, and made his office into like a chimney, you know – bricks, all in paper, and everything. And he was going, "What are you lot doing now?" I said "Don't worry now, as long as it's not interfering with our work." We'd still be working like mad, but, and it was lovely, and we had a Santa Claus on the top. He said "Oh! thank you, girls."

40. 40

And they did the same up in Dowlais, they used to put decorations up for Christmas, and Mary, who was from Aberfan (she died of breast cancer) – she was a marvellous entertainer, (she didn't have to have a drink or nothing like that) and she used to make beautiful clothes (and she was big woman – sometimes she used to frighten people, mind), she made herself a beautiful Wonder Woman outfit **'She'd come running in then, .. when it would be our Christmas dinner, all of a sudden there would be Mary coming running like Wonderwoman, you know, and she would look like her mind, she was pretty, and she would be going around collecting now, for this and everything, and the chap who the manager up in Dowlais, and for a while in Pentre-bach, one of them would say "Mary's coming to you now," and he'd run like anything! Well, I'll say one thing about Bondor, there was nowhere else like it as far as being a nice atmosphere and you know, it was a marvellous place to work really.'**

She never did a lot with her fellow workers socially – only occasionally **'When we were in Dowlais (it wasn't long before her sister died – on Christmas day) ... we used to go out on a Christmas time and we used to have a minibus ('cos there was much smaller amount of people there, see – only the ones in the cutting room and the girls in the fabric office (Joyce – she's gone and all – everybody's gone)) we used to go to a pub in ... over the mountain – the Usk Hotel, Talybont. ... The lady who kept the Usk Hotel – she was terribly grand and always drunk! – and she kept, nicely drunk mind, sort of posh drunk, ... and we used to make her a little something when we go over on Christmas. And she kept dogs, boxers, and they were on all the things in the pub, you know, all the serviettes, everything – they all had these dogs on, they were beautiful, mind, the dogs were, but,'** when they first went there she asked them if the dogs were alright – Yes no trouble at all. Because our Renee dresses up **'You should see the things she used to make, they're all there ... upstairs in the attic I expect, she used to do Santa – dress up in Santa, So I said "My friend dresses up as Santa you see, with a sack and everything. Will the dogs be frightened?" And she said "Oh, no, I don't think so". So I said "Right, okay then".** So the first time they went there, there were about twelve of them on the minibus, and a couple of the girls weren't working in Bondor, one was a nurse – Eirwen; Renee had presents for them all – packed, 'To Nursey Eirwen' 'to Shirley Temple' ... crackers! **'and me, I was the Bionic woman!' 'We had screamingly funny times, you know.'** When they went in the first night there – you went down some steps and you could see into the other bar, the local bar, with Renee all dressed up as Santa Claus, - some of the chaps on the other side who had been there all day must be thinking they were seeing things! Mrs Robertson was delighted – they had made her a 'peignoir' as a present, and Renne put on it 'To the nicest landlady we've ever met.' A peignoir – like a scarf – it did look beautiful because it was all lace.

46.20

'We could buy fabric in Bondor, when they had finished an order and there'd be fabric left in the stores, they'd sell it in the factory shop. I used to call them everything I did, "I'd say 'Excuse me, I'm the one the bags come to, do you think I've got nothing else to

do? Only cut out for you lot?”, very rare did we have a dinner break when we was in Dowlais, very rare, ‘cos I was always cutting things out.’

She went to work in Pentre-bach at ten past eight; they had an hour for lunch, and two breaks (she thinks); they finished at about ten to six. Clock in in the morning, out lunchtime and clock in and clock out to go home. She’s not sure if this was kept up in Dowlais – clocking in but not out, unless you had to go somewhere. **‘But you see, if you was on the machines, you got what you earned.’** On the machines they were on piecework and a basic wage as well. But **‘their basic wage was very low, it is in the rag trade, always was. Like ours in the cutting room was very low – a little bit higher than theirs, but we didn’t have the opportunity to earn extra money on the piecework side. We had, what they used to call in Dowlais, and, did we have them in Pentre-bach as well? I think we did, we had a bonus on top. We’d lay a hundred metres roll for (old money now) a penny, so if you laid a thousand metres, like, you know, over the time, you’d have that much bonus on top. ... But of course when you were changing from one lay to another, and different fabrics and all this business, it was hard going to try to find – do something – it wasn’t easy work. Physically, it was hard, but I liked it. It suited me.’**

49.10

She caught a service bus to work. She thought the company did lay on buses in Pentre-bach, because there were lots of buses going to Pentre-bach – Merthyr Corporation buses, Dowlais was the same - so many coming from different areas. **‘More or less we used to go from door to door anyway, because when we were down there in Pentre-bach, it was just from here, down there and back. ... I’ve seen Renee and I walking through the snow nearly up to our waist to go to work. Then we get up there then, we’d go in and there be nobody hardly there, only us idiots! They’d say “Oh well, we’ll have to go home.” And that would be it then.’**

You wouldn’t get paid for this **‘not even when you’d made the effort.’**

Holidays – a fortnight in August – the normal thing, and as time went on they had a week about Whitsuntime. And of course Christmas time they’d have two or three days. These were paid holidays. She usually just went visiting on her holidays – visiting sick people – between his family and hers. His brother lived in Stoke, her sister lived in Coventry – she was ill as well. So they went from Merthyr to Coventry, from Coventry to Stoke and across then to north Wales – Abergele or somewhere like that, for a week, and then the other part of it then, they would come back down to David and Sylvia’s (Stoke), back down to her sister’s and ... **‘I’ve never been abroad, I’ve never been in an aeroplane.... never bothered me.’** Ann and Renee would **‘kill to go on holidays’**

Day trips? – Yes, **‘they used to run trips from work,’** she did join them sometimes, but because her husband enjoyed that sort of thing they would go together. In the early days she wasn’t available because of her home life.

Her work didn't really change when she was at KB. **'It changed up to a point when we went over to Courtaulds. ... they were a huge company ... and we had a lot more work from abroad.'** She didn't start supervising until she went into Forma –there she was in charge of the cutting room and training other workers. They did have pay-rises **'definitely'**. When she left KB she was only on about £70-80 a week then. **She left to go to London because Jack was going to the British Oxygen Company and she was having about £7 a week then - 1960.** But in London the money was entirely different – she went into the rag trade again, into shirts.

Unions? She was a member of the Union **'especially down Pentre-bach.'** It was the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union. **'We had one dispute in Dowlais, much later, when we were Courtaulds, - a big mistake, but there we are, you can't tell people. Anyway, down Pentre-bach we didn't have any disputes that I can ever remember. And we had our rises because the unions saw to that, didn't it. When I was in Pentre-bach I did go on the union for a while, as a shop steward.'** She quite enjoyed that **'It was okay. But the only trouble was with that, I got a bit disillusioned, because I'm inclined to believe what I'm told, and that's not the name of the game, I'm afraid. ... so in the end I said, "That's it, I'm not doing this no more", because I'd be going and representing certain people, and it would come out then they'd told me a pack of lies ... about money, and I couldn't put up with it. I said "I'm sorry, I've had enough of this."** I'd done it – and of course when you were on the union in those days, especially when you were a shop steward, you had to stay after work. You didn't go to union meetings during the day, nothing like that, you went after work. Which was another thing that was a bit difficult for me, because my father was still alive then, and I couldn't do it.'

There was one dispute in Dowlais **'and we all went out on strike. Never been heard of. Two weeks.'** It was about money, **'we were offered a £5 pay increase, not all together in one lump, ... we could have £2 in October and £3 in the March.'** The unions wouldn't have that **'no way were they going to have that, and it all went up in the air like a big balloon, and Trevor Simms, who was one of the trouble-shooters for Courtaulds came down, he had a big easel in the canteen, I thought "You can't see what he's doing here at all – we are - insulting, I thought it was."** ... He was saying **"You can't have a rise at so-and so, Courtaulds have offered that, this, that and everything",** and it all became quite – not very nice. And they were all saying **"We're not going to do it, we're going to go on strike,"** and all this business. And I thought, **"Never been heard of".** Anyway, ... you know what it's like, it gets out of hand and it gets like a load of sheep, one's following the other. And he was saying, **"They've had to cut down in Abermarle Street, with the design place, and they've had to do this",** and writes it all down on the board, ... and he said **"Do you think for one minute, that Courtaulds are concerned about a little factory with 200 people, in the ...",** (what did he say?)... not the tips, but that sort of thing, he said **"They couldn't care less. So you just keep that in mind now",** he said, **"because what they'll do is shut you down."** They did in the end didn't they? I said to

Evelyn, who was the chief shop steward, “Evelyn ... they’re be losing their jobs if they’re not careful.” I said “He means it. He’s nobody’s fool I can tell you. He’s not a trouble-shooter for nothing .. I’m telling you.” What happened in the end? Her husband was angry that he had to get up at six in the morning to take her up to the factory to be on strike. He was retired! He was in his pyjamas and put his clothes over them! He had to take her and Renee up there. ‘**We were cooking sausages and all sorts of things outside the factory because they wouldn’t let you in, see.**’ This was in the early eighties? The factory was closed around 1983-4 – they were only there for about three years after that.

1.00.26

The employers in KB and Courtaulds were ‘**different ball game altogether**’. I mean, **Kaiser Bondor was a family concern. And I mean for a long, long time, David Goodenday who was the son of John Goodenday, I mean John Goodenday used to come down the factory, he was the boss, .. and the owners, they were a different sort of people. I didn’t see anybody for Courtaulds only somebody like Trevor Simms, the trouble-shooter. ‘Mars bar’ I used to call him ... He asked why? “It’s my little nickname for you because if you was a bar of chocolate you’d eat yourself.” He thought he was the ?kiddy you know. He was a good looking man, I’m not saying, but I mean, one of these ones, he loves himself so much, I can’t stand that sort of thing, me’.** (mentions her husband). He said “I don’t know whether that sounds nice or not” “Oh well, I mean, take your own choice.” But he knew what he was talking about, in the work ... There was another gentleman who used to work with us, John Sambrook, very nice chap, in Kaiser’s in Dowlais,’ – he looked after orders – he went out to Saudi ‘**cos we used to make garments for them. You can imagine what they were like! We’d have lace, say about, well, eighteen inches deep, ... and it would all be going on to the garment, with gold embroidery on it, beautiful. And you’d have to match all that before you’d be ... it had to be done separate, (demonstrates) ... it had to be absolutely spot on, so that each one would match. ‘Cos it would cost a fortune. .. I used to say to him sometimes “John, I’m glad these women aren’t big fat ones anyway. At least the garments are small.”** They didn’t do lots of them – it was mostly all handwork.

With the strike, although she realised that they could close the factory down, she still supported the action. ‘**There was only a handful of us there, weren’t we? You couldn’t do anything else really. ... We all stuck together. And we had £3 in the October and £2 in the March. Exactly the same money, but at different times.**’ One of the workers argued that the company had given in – I thought “**You idiot, that you are**”’. She knew they wouldn’t be there much longer. The work was getting less, and less and less all the time. Renee said, “**Talk about the writing on the wall. What’s the matter with them**”. “**Don’t ask me**”, I said. And the better half of it was, Renee and her were doing the really difficult work.

1.04.09

The bosses of Kaiser used to come regularly to the factory, - the Goodendays. They collected around all the factories at one time (She can't remember how old he was) – John Goodenday and they had a portrait painted in oils, **'beautiful thing it was, it was as big as that dresser, beautiful and they were taking it round all the factories, displaying it on the canteen, and he was going around and thanking everybody, you know, they were gentlemen.'** They decided to pack it up, the portrait must be in his home. It must have cost thousands. The portrait is in the book.

She wore an overall – she thinks the factory provided them. In Dowlais they didn't wear all the same uniforms. She thinks all the factories after the war were doing it – everybody wearing overalls, **'We, in the cutting room were allowed to wear trousers. Because, otherwise they weren't. But trousers was because we were bending over the tables all the time, see. I used to spend half of my life on top of the table.'** They weren't allowed to wear trousers in the factory – **'it wasn't ladylike!'**

Her work wasn't dangerous – it was very heavy. **'I did cut my finger once, because I was doing what I shouldn't have been doing. We used to make styles with all pleats and they made the pleating in the factory, on the pleating machines, but of course it was for frills on the bottom of the nightdresses and the bottom of half-slips and all this, so when it came off the pleating machine, it was full of white paper, that was how it was done, all pleated. Well, of course, you had to cut it, didn't you, and half the time, by the time you asked the men to do it you'd have done it yourself. So, I did do it the one day, - that finger it was, luckily that I had nice fat nails, curvy nails, and of course I had nail varnish on as well, didn't I. So I'm going up the table now, 'cos we used to be cutting it and whoever you was working with at the time would be rolling it after you, cos it was quick, see, you could do loads ... – the men were supposed to do it, and I'm walking up the table now, and all of a sudden I went "Oh, I've cut my nail!" and then I went "Oh no I haven't. It's the nail varnish", and all of a sudden then, when you've cut yourself nothing happens and there's blood spouting out. And I went "Oh my God, I have cut it! My nail's on the table". It was flat. I couldn't have stitches or anything like that because it was one ... I went down to Rosie the nurse then and I had – the two cutters then, Roy and one of the other chaps, ... and they were all going "Mair have cut her finger off!". Well, I hadn't. I hadn't cut it off, I'd cut it flat. And they were coming now with the white tissue paper, "Mop it up love. Go on mop it up." So off I went down the nurse now, with this blood everywhere, and she said "What on earth have you done?" she was like, and I went, "I cut my finger on the machine" "Well, you shouldn't have been using it, should you?" I said, "No," I couldn't deny it – I shouldn't have been. So she said, she took hold of the paper now, ... "Well, you won't be going up the hospital, I can assure you, 'cos there's nothing that can be done, you can't have stitches in that and all the rest of it." ... So she said, "I'll dress it for you now", and she said "and you'd better take a couple of aspirin ... when you go home," - not go home – when you go home! – "cos you'll be in a lot of pain tonight, I can assure you." And I said "Oh!" So she said "You can come in everyday and I'll see to it for you every day." Because of the shape of**

the nail, it didn't cut the quick. So that saved it. Her friend who was working with her, wrapped the nail with the flesh underneath and all the blood – wrapped it up in paper, and she was running all round the factory going, “Look Mair has cut her finger off!” And people were fainting! **It was only a little bit – most of it was the colour of the blood. And I was going, “Rita will you stop it! For goodness sake, you’re frightening everybody.” Back to work then after – still had the machine going.** Rita used it instead of her – though she was like a mad thing.

1.10.30

One of the men who was using the ban knife. Pat, - he did cut his finger off. She was working on the table next to him. He was using the ban knife which was up against the wall – it had a green formica top, so you couldn't miss it and he called her over to switch the machine off because he'd cut his finger. The top had gone. She sent him down the nurse, - on his own. The finger was there – he did get compensation for it. It was cut off – and there it was. So she put it in a little bit of something and she said to the boss (was it Ken Stevens? Jock had gone – he'd finished) **“I don't know what you're going to do with that” I said, “but you'd better keep it as evidence - part of cutter's finger.” He said “I was wondering what ...? the ban knife”. “Well, I wasn't using it I can assure you”, I said. “That I wouldn't do, I wouldn't take that chance.”** They were supposed to use special metal gloves to use on the ban knife, and he didn't have it on. So it went right through the bone. He did have compensation eventually because they couldn't understand because if he'd had gloves on, it wouldn't have happened like that. Not to take it right off. That's the only accident she knew about, really.

Other rules? You couldn't smoke in the toilet. No smoking. They smoked when they went to break, in the canteen. Most people were smokers in those days. **‘I used to smoke myself then, but not much.’** She used to smoke about 60 cigarettes a week. Renee used to say that Mair had given up smoking because they'd gone up to £1 a packet. She thinks she was about 40 when she gave up smoking. One of the reasons was the cost- **‘£1 a packet, no sense in it – by the end of the week I could have a nice little jumper for myself!’** They all smoked in the canteen – they also smoked in the toilet, which they weren't supposed to. A lady who lived in Troedryhiw looked after the toilets **‘and I'm not kidding you, you could see your face in the floor, ‘cos she was really fussy. And she used to go round the doors in the toilet, knocking the toilet doors and saying “Come out from there, because I saw you going in and you're smoking.”’** There was space at the bottom of the door. You could deny – but she would say **“I can see you – out! I'm going to fetch your supervisor”.** **And all the brass, the taps, down in Bondor, in the toilets and everything, they were all brass. I had to wear sunglasses on to go in there. It was beautiful – all shining. And if you dare make a mess on her sinks and her taps – God help you.** The toilets weren't so beautiful in Dowlais. They were alright.

1.14.50

She forgot to mention that she went to work in AB Metals for **‘four days the first week and five days the next – two weeks! I’ve never seen anything like it in my life! What a place. And the toilets – I mean a lot of that was the people working there. Cos when I asked one of the girls who was sitting next to me, I said “Can you show me where the toilet is please?” ... and between it was a fact(ory), I was thinking, if my mother could see me now she’d turn in her grave. It was exactly like she thought things were going to be, you know. And I was in the toilet, I couldn’t believe it, I said to the girl ... “Why do you put up with this lot? You lot? What’s the matter with you? I know”, I said “ that the people done this .. “ ?... filthy language written all over the toilet walls, and it wasn’t very clean.’** And on break time they didn’t go to the canteen – it was so small, nobody used it – there were trolleys coming round by the benches. **‘And I kept thinking “There’s a horrible place”.** She went there because Jack was in the tool room there – on inspection. He’d told her she’d hate it , but they were taking people on, and of course, it was good money, she thought she could work with him. **‘Anyway, this trolley arrived now, with all sandwiches on, nothing over the top of it, they were covered, ... and the woman who was pushing the trolley, she said “Those are cheese,” Oh some of them were terrible, mind. Aren’t they? I know you shouldn’t say it, but, “and those are so and so” There they were now picking up sandwiches like this .. and putting them back down, and the thing is, your hands were all fine oil you know. . And she said to me “Do you want a sandwich Mair?” “No thank you” I said. ... but I thought to myself “Well, nobody was bothered.”**

1.17.15

And then the language down there. There was one woman there she was the supervisor, supposed to be on the line, they called her Black Matty, cos she had this jet, jet black hair, that was dyed of course, but it was jet black, and she’d be coming down the line, and every other word was you know, the F word and I thought “you’d better not come here and say that to me, I’m telling you now,”. So I said to this girl, she was from over Nelson, and I said to her, “Why, what’re you putting up with that for?” And she said “Oh, she’s always like that, she ...” And I said “Oh well, sorry” I said, “I don’t think we should have to go to work and put up with that. It’s bad enough having to work in a room full of men.” And I said, “And I’ll tell you something now (cos I knew, of course that Jack was working there, cos of course, he comes to see me, didn’t he, half way through the morning and he’s coming), and she said “Is that your husband?” “Yes” “He’s in the tool room is he?” I said “Yes”. So she said “Oh, no wonder you had the job then. “And I said “What you say no wonder I had the job? What are you talking about?” I said “What? Do you think this is a wonderful job? Cos I don’t,” I said “You’re like a lot of monkeys. There was a little thing that went in the television, and you had to put them on the machine like that, push it in, and there was logarithms and anti-logarithms by the side, and then you were allowed so much of a difference between one and the other ... after all, fair play.’ It was not only tedious work but also your hand were covered with oil and the place itself was terrible. She thought **“I’m not sticking this”**

and that Jack was right. When they came home on the Friday, after the first week, he said he knew she wouldn't stay there. And that was the truth.

But she'd been up to Kaiser Bondor, - Ken had sent a message asking her to come up to see him. She told Mona, her other friend, that she would be up on Wednesday afternoon. When she arrived, there was the Personnel Manageress there then who had been down Pentre-bach and in Dowlais - She wasn't a very nice person – she was one of the ones Mair had had a few words with, not about herself, but about other people. She denied knowing anything about her and that Ken Stevens hadn't left her any instructions and she said, '**and you just can't walk in here when it suits you.**' So Mair left and went back home. In the night the phone went, it was Ken wanting to know where she was that afternoon – they'd all been waiting for her and he'd been asking Mona where she was. She explained, she'd felt she would hit her (the Personnel Officer) in the face –or walk out – so Mair walked out. Ken invited her up the next afternoon then, but there wasn't any real need for her to come up because he offered '**Can you start back?**' So she decided to go back to her home (KB). '**Talk about going from one extreme to the other. It was like going from hell – from fairy land to hell**'. She had to work a week's notice, and she went back a week Monday. On the Monday she had to go in and give her a week's notice, after only being there four days. She can see him now '**Mr Davies his name was, he was like a little blackbird.**' She explained about the notice "**I'm sorry**" I said "**if it's inconvenient (but there were loads of people after jobs) ... but I'm going back to where I worked before in Kaiser Bondor.**" He argued that she had a really good job down in the factory (A B Metals). So she told him that someone else can have a really good job then. "**It's not my cup of tea. It's my fault entirely, because Jack did tell me ... but I wouldn't listen. .. I've learnt my lesson now.**" And she told him that it was like going from fairy land to hell. He said, "**There's nothing wrong with the place.**"

1.22.50

So were you a cut above do you think in Kaiser Bondor. It sounds like a very nice place to work?

Oh definitely, definitely. If Miss Rummy heard you swear or anything like that, there'd be ructions there – wasn't allowed. Anything like that – the men as well, mind. Nothing like that was allowed – she was a real stickler you know. She had the Queen's medal for indust.. lovely looking woman. Dressed beautiful; white, white hair. Strict but a very nice person. I got on great with her, I did.' Mair would ask permission to go on the machines, - they were allowed to do some sewing in the dinner time. Miss Rummy would ask what she was doing. Mair was making a little buster suit for her friend's son. She said "**I'll need to see it after mind, to examine it.**" I said "**It's alright, I can sew.**" "**I've no doubt that you can, probably better than quite a few of these.**" But she was a lovely person.

Relations between the women and the men? "**Well, the few men that were there, fine, great you know. We had the most men in the cutting room, see.**" The rest of them were mechanics – they were with the girls all the time. Some of them married them. The management didn't mind if you got married or went back to work after having children. You

could work up right through pregnancy. In those days it was so many weeks before and so many weeks after, or if you wanted to, you could work up to nearly the end of your pregnancy and then have your other days afterwards. Say it was thirteen weeks and you were O.K., you could carry on – you couldn't do the work in the cutting room but on the machines they were sitting down anyway. A lot of them worked on and had their thirteen weeks after. **They were very accommodating.** No childcare facilities – she doesn't think those sort of things existed then.

1.25.45

After Kaiser Bondor closed, she went to Barton's for a twelvemonth - skirt manufacturers. **'I didn't like that place at all. So I only stayed there a year, Forma was opening and the chap who had the firm, he asked me whether I'd go to work in the cutting room.'** She had another friend who was working there and she'd said she'd ask Mair whether she'd come. She stayed in Forma until she retired. She was supervisor in Forma. **"I was running the cutting room, so it was exactly the same thing."** She did have to train some people – Sian, and another young man came in but he was trained as a cutter already. Forma made entirely bras, a few half-slips and tops, and that was it. It was quite a small factory – only about 30 there altogether. It started off with just two of them in the cutting room and a part-time boy, and it got a bit bigger, and the machinists were all from Berlies. Then they moved to another factory, up in Dowlais again, because it was bigger, and they were getting more work then. She names the women who worked with her Marie, another girl, Jackie, Anita (her friend who'd been in Bondor for donkey's years).

She was in Forma for about seven years altogether. And retired at 60.

Looking back? **"I enjoyed everywhere, except Barton's..."** She didn't like the people there – grabs, I don't like that sort of thing. There were quite a few Kaiser girls there – that's why it opened, because he was having experienced machinists from KB **"and I mean experienced. They'd been there donkey's years before I was working there."**

She kept in touch with quite a few of her KB friends. She still sees some of them – there were so many working there. Renee rings her almost every week with news – someone else dead. She enjoyed working in Chard's in London as well – it was different but she learnt things there. She was making men's shirts – lovely shirts – she did learn quite a lot there. John was in charge of the cutting room, he had to be a qualified tailor too. Mr Chard opened the factory based on John's expertise and knowledge and his papers. Another man there, Mr Mordiano – an Italian. The tailor used to come to the factory from Austin Reed – measuring him in the office for suits. He was a natty dresser. Nice polite man but you rarely saw him on the factory floor.

The one she liked most? **"Because of the length of time I was in Kaiser, and it was always you know, changeable, and pleasant and lovely, well, garments and every single thing - I preferred Kaiser (can't say I preferred,) .. I enjoyed everything because everything was a little bit new."**