

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

**Johnson's Bottle Top Factory – Port Talbot, Wern Aluminium – Aberafan,  
Merlin Sponge Factory – Port Talbot**

**Interviewee:** VSE044 Maureen Jones,  
**Date:** 11/4/14  
**Interviewer:** Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's  
Archive of Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru

*So tell me your name and date of birth please.*

Right; Maureen Jones and my date of birth is 30/11/46.

*Tell me a little about your background. Your mother, your father what they did, what work they did, and if you had any brothers and sisters.*

Right. Well I've got three sisters and two brothers, besides myself. My father, I think he worked in the Abbey and then he worked in the BP. I don't think my mother worked much. I think she worked in a tin plate at one time but not for long, because she had children. Of course were all grown up now and we got grand children and whatever. And when my mother died about seven years ago, my father died about nine years ago, and my husband then that you just seen had a small stroke about six years ago, and he hasn't been himself since. But he won't have it, he's forgetful now but... There's nothing much. My granny, she had about 10 children in those days, 10 or 12 children. There's only three of tem left now, they've all died, I've got tree uncles left. They've all seemed to have died of cancer though, everyone seemed to have died of kind of cancer like. So, big families in those days weren't they? But I had three children, two boys and a girl, and they're grown up now. My youngest is 42, 43 this year, and the oldest is 47.

*Let me ask you a little bit about your education, where you went to primary school, where you went to secondary school that kind of thing?*

Well we went to just a normal school – Sandfields. There wasn't no Comp in those days it was the three schools in one place like. When my children grew up they were going to Comp because the Comps were about then weren't they. But we didn't have

a Comp when we were at school it was just the three schools all – infants, juniors, seniors – all in the same building. We left at 15 then when we were in school.

*02:19 Right. Did you want to leave at 15?*

No. That was the age to leave, at 15, see.

*Right. You wouldn't have wanted to have carried on then?*

Well, the reason I didn't carry on was because I had a nasty accident when I was 15 and I couldn't do my exams. So I was home from school for about six weeks because I couldn't go to school so I missed them. My sister when on to Margam college and all that, she did. But I had an accident, I scalded myself and I couldn't do the exams. When I left school, I left school on the Friday and was in work in the Monday [laughs].

*So what did you go and do then?*

I was in Johnsons factory working with the bottle tops...

*So did you have to have an interview for that?*

We went for the interview on the Friday, Thursday. No. We left school on the Friday, I think we went for the interview on the Friday teatime, and they said, "start Monday". I was only 15 like, and that was young then really wasn't it?

*What kind of things did they ask you?*

Well, nothing much really. What I was interested in, well you don't know at that age do you? I always wanted to work in the shop with the sweets. But I ended up nearly working all my life in factories then. Working in factories or cleaning or whatever.

*So what did you do in the factory?*

The first job I was on, they put me on, feeding the machines with the tops and then I had to watch them coming out, check them to make sure they weren't, like, you know. Perfect then isn't it? We had to put them in this muslin bag to get the oil off of them and chuck them in the machine. And then they put me on the hand feeder, get them with my fingers and feed them, like that. And you had to be fast like, and out, keep it full. Then of course they chucked me on the oiler where we used to punch all the old tops out to keep for recycling if anything was damaged, punch all the cardboard out of the inside...

*Did you have to have any training for any of this?*

No, no.

*You just went straight in?*

Just went straight there. Straight there we went.

*Take me through your working day then, when you started.*

Well I was 15. We used to get up in the morning and Gran lived in the street next to the factory, see? I'd go there for dinner like and the back to work. We thought we had a lot of money, £5 a week [laughs]. I used to give my mother £4 and £1 pocket money for myself. My father always used to say to me "I'm keeping you" and I used to say "no I'm keeping myself now", I said. £5 was my first wage, it was a lot back then wasn't it? We all had to queue in a row to get our pays like, and then go home.

*So you could walk to work then?*  
Yes, I was only living local, see?

*05:07 So, what time in the morning did you start?*

I think it was 9 o'clock if I can remember. I think about 9. I think it was 9 till 4, something like that, it was. But to be working so young, 15, only just left school and straight in work like. I worked there for about a year and a half and my mother had to tell me to give it up because she was expecting a baby. She was a handful, she was only 4.5lb born and we had to feed her every hour through the night. She kept saying "Maureen you'll have to give that job up" she said, to look after her. So that's when I gave it up then, see? Then I had another job then.

*Before we get there I want to ask you a lot more questions.*  
Right. [Laughs]

*So what did you say the name of the factory was?*

Johnson's, it was called Johnson's factory, see? Bottle top factory.

*And where exactly was that?*

Its in Henshaw Street. At the bottom of Henshaw Street, down by there. And my granny lived in that street, so it was handy then like.

*So you get in at 9 o'clock in the morning, you could walk to work. Did you have to clock in?*

Yes we did. I remember that, because I had my number, clock in number in my mind for ages, but its gone now. But we used to clock in, that's right, and clock out, yeah.

*And what breaks did you have in the day?*

We had a dinner break. I can't remember if we had a breakfast break, I don't know. But I know we had a dinner break because I used to go to my granny's for food. She thought it was wonderful, she used to give me a pasty and a tin of peas and then I'd have a cake after. She thought she was cooking, she wasn't doing any cooking really, but because she thought she was cooking for me, she was happy cooking for me like. I'd do that every day, then we'd have the weekend of didn't we.

*So how long was your dinner break?*

Um. I think it must have been a hour at least. I had to have been an hour.

*You can't remember any breaks in the morning or afternoon?*

I can't remember having a tea break. We were allowed to go to the toilet if we wanted to go to the toilet. But once the machines were going I think it was only at dinnertime we had a break. And if we did want to go to the toilet we have to ask to go to the toilet. But remember it must have been an hour for dinner because by the time I went home and had my food and went back, clocked back in. I can't remember having a break for breakfast time.

*So how many people work there then?*

Aw, there was loads there, loads there, the factory was full wasn't it.

*Was it hundreds, or...?*

Well, they had another thing up the top, see? Where the older women were working with the big sheets, cutting them out. There was another thing by there with all the tops going in to make sure the circles was like straight. That was called the rubber plant I think. Then we was on the machines, like, see?

*So the older women were cutting out the tops?*

Well I think they had the older, more experienced up there. I was only 15 wasn't I. There were doing that, the ones who had been there longer than me.

*So what did they have to cut out the...?*

The big sheets; they had to put them through this machine, they're all marked out with circles and it would cut them all out like that. They were just flat then see? And our machine, I would edge them all and do them all pretty like, do all the edging of them. We had to check them now and again and if they were buckled, see, there was something on the end of the thing, making all like lines and that. But we had to make sure the machine didn't run out because they were all going in the box and filling up.

*08:48 Where did the material come from? Was it from the steel works here?*

I don't know. I was so young so I can't remember. I can't remember, they went on for years Johnson's did. They started working night shift as well they did. But then its closed now isn't it.

*How many... So was it mainly women who worked there?*

Well them men were the people mending the machines and things like that, see? And fetching you the tops and whatever, they were fetching all them for us. I didn't actually see any men working on the machines just the ones that were mending them and things like that. I can remember quite a few men that were there. They would put on the hand machine then they had to fill them for you, out the tops in for you, see? You couldn't keep stopping it. So they were filling the hand one but if you were on one yourself you just chuck them in yourself.

*So were you on a kind of line or was it sort of separated?*

Well there was like sections. Like one was for that, one was for this, the other one was for that. We was on the machines in that row see? One time I put the tops in upside down, didn't I [laughs].

*So what happened when you did that?*

Well they've all got to be punched back out then, see? The lining. Because you've got a row of the insides of them, cardboard, and they're all in a piece of paper and we had to strip, open them like that and slot them down the machine like that. Of course they were upside down weren't they, instead of the white showing the brown was showing, so they go in into the punch out machine then and punch them all out then see?

*So you didn't lose the tops?*

Oh no they don't get lost. Nothing got wasted there because all the bad tops went into recycling and things like that, see?

Bill, this old man that used to work there, he thought it was disgusting the job they put me on. It was called the knocking out machine but... D'you know like when the tops

are coming back they were filthy, there was all muck in them like people chucking food in and I had to handle all that to get all the tops out, and he said *“its disgusting, they should shut that machine down”* he said, “Oh I don’t mind” I said like, its just picking up all sorts out the rubbish isn’t it.

*So as well as fresh sheets then you would recycle the old tops?*

All the old tops that was no good, see? Or done wrong, or something like that. They would crush them all then they would I think.

*11:06 Would you get them back?*

I don’t know if they got sent somewhere else, but if they had the top, you know the card in them I had to punch them out this other machine. But then they would all go in another box and then, as I said, they got recycled for something else. I don’t think anything went to waste there.

*So did you only make bottle tops then?*

Only bottle tops I used to see being made there. The cut out sheets would cut them out, then there was another one putting the liners in, the one making the edges and they had the big tops like that as well, see the white top the red circle, had to make sure they were straight. I think that was the rubber plant that was. But I suppose it was enjoyable at the time, a job and the money coming in the pocket and a pound back for me [laughs].

*What happened to the tops at the end of the day, where do they go?*

Well, if you were on the job making the boxes, you know, you had to make the boxes up, you had to weigh the box and put what weight was on there, see? So when the tops go in there then they’d weigh that and how many and what weight was each box with the tops. So there was all different kinds of jobs there. They put me on the machine and that. I had these old fashioned pinny’s on that you tie at the back, and I remember once my pinny cord got caught in the handle and pulled me like that and all the tops went everywhere and they were all clapping and cheering *??? (12:32 - 12:37)*. They were all clapping like that because it pulled me like that. Dangerous they were when you think with a string weren’t they? We had the string pinny’s like that so one of them must have been loose and when the machine was going in and out like that my thing got caught and it pulled me. I was wiping a bag of tops like that and they all went everywhere and oh god my face. I didn’t know where to look, but they were all clapping and all like I was picking them all up.

*I was going to ask you that; do you think the work was dangerous in any way?*

Only because of the overall I had on because I though they should have either one that pop over your head, but nothing with string. They were green ones and you had to put them over your head like that and tie them. But I said if that happened to open and caught in there it’ll pull you wouldn’t it? People have had finger off and all haven’t they, you know machines, putting their finger on the machine.

*Yeah. Did anything like that happen in there?*

Not when I was there. But I was talking to a woman the other day who had been working there and she didn’t no finger. She said her finger went in and it cut it off.

*13:04 Do you know what machine she was on?*

Couldn't tell you, couldn't tell you.

*But they sounded pretty, you know...*

She must have been something you push and put her finger through. It could have been when the blades were coming out, chopping them, I don't know.

*They sound pretty dangerous because they were chopping metal weren't they?*

Mmmm. But the machines were coming down, see, like that and they were sitting on the chair like this, what I can remember, and they put the sheet in like that it would go along like that and this thing would come down and just chop them out, the shape of them, see? Good how they were done mind wasn't it? Any time I had to open something I said "*oh, I was doing these tops*" like bottle tops.

*So did the machines have guards on them?*

Um. Going around you mean?

*No guards to stop people getting injured...*

Well I know they had this, what I can remember, they had this sort of round handle that went on and out like that. That was the one that when the tops were coming down the shoot, they were the one going in and out marking all the edges like that. I mean they were pretty safe in a way, its just you've got to make sure you don't go too near it with anything with string is all. Because as it was cutting that it just happen to put... I mean I didn't have no accident it just pulled the string like that my tops went everywhere. It was shock it was, pulling me. But no I don't think it could have hurt me because if the string had got caught there's no way I could have gone in the machine or anything, I would have just gone up to it like that, you know.

*Were you made aware of health and safety and things like that?*

I can't remember, I was too young, see. You know, when you get older you was but because I was so young just excited working weren't we.

*15:27 You know you overall then; was it something that they gave you?*

Yes, they supplied us with the overalls.

*So what were they like?*

It was like a wrap over one they used to wear in the old fashioned da and tie it there like. Green, emerald green sort of. You put it on and you tie it there like that. Well of course mine used to come open a bit, see? But after that mind I think they changed the style of the overalls you know. I didn't stay there that long then, people were going there working nights and I noticed they were wearing nylon overalls, their own I suppose they were wearing then, see. But at the time they were supplying you with these green ones.

*Were they cotton then?*

Cotton, yeah, and I think the men had like royal blue boiler suits on, see?

*Tell me what it was like the first day you walked in. Was it noisy, was it...?*

Oh there's noise in there because all the machines are going, and it was strange and I don't know if they put me on something easy first of all I can't remember because feeding that machine was easy. But when I was on the hand machine you've got to

keep up with it. I think I had been there a bit longer before they put me on that. But when you were putting your fingers in them there's all like little pieces of... you the metal that comes off the edge? You've got to sort of separate them with your fingers and that, and you go like that and then your like this all the time, you know, feeding ten at a time like that. But when you're putting it in the machine to do, you're getting all the oil off them first, see, and then you chuck them in and they just come down the shoot on their own. And you've just got to go now and gain and make sure they're all right, like that see, if you've got a bad one then they'll all be bad, because its got to be cleaned on one of the little cut-outs. There could be a little piece of metal stuck on it and it makes all the tops go rigid then, see? I used to love it when I was there, its just I had to give it up because of my mother having a baby.

*Was it a big place, do you know?*

Tidy size. Tidy size, yeah.

*And is it still there now?*

Still there, but they're using it for something else. One part of it was a furniture shop and making furniture. When I was in there with my friend the other day, buying a 3-piece, I was looking, thinking, this used to be my factory... looking at it and all the roof with water coming in everywhere.

*17:51 What were the conditions like when you were there, like lighting and heat and stuff like that?*

Well, we didn't notice that it was cold or anything, it must have been warm enough... it probably hadn't been long built when we were there. Plenty light, I never complained of being cold, I never felt cold anyway. But...

*It was quite comfortable to work there was it?*

Yeah I liked it. All my friend used to tease me, they told this man I was after him [laughs], and every time he came to put the tops in he'd give me the eye, you know. I used to run to the toilet, and she told me after she fixed a date with him I said "I could kill you". If he was nice looking I wouldn't have minded, he was horrible and he kept giving me the eyes because they told him that I fancied him and I didn't, you know. I laugh when I think of it now. But anyway I had a couple of friends that worked with me and they finished. And I do see people now who used to work there and they don't remember me but I remember them like.

*When you went there were there people there you knew from school and stuff like that?*

Only me and my friend. My friend from... I don't know how I met her but. No I didn't know her I met her after, that's right. I got to know her after; we became friends after we did. There was a couple of girls in the older class from my school... about tow or three years older than me. So I don't know if they had been working there three years before me, I don't know. But there was a couple of people I knew. You get to know them all when you're there though don't you? There was one man with one arm, Bill, I think he's dead now, and his son was there. They were all feeding and fetching the tops and everything, mechanics, they were all something to do with that.

*So any relatives working there?*

Nobody belonging to me was there, no. No.

*You were talking about this man? What was the relationship like between the women and the men working there?*

They were alright. We used to say "Bill the machine is broke" or "Bill", "I'll be there now" he used to say... But I mean, I was shy and young I was [laughs]. But ohh, thinking back now isn't it?

*Any harassment going on either way?*

No. Pretty good. And I don't know who the boss was, there at the time, but supervisors were pretty good, the ones supervising you, they were pretty good to work for.

*Were they local people or were they brought in from somewhere else?*

When I say local, they didn't live around this area, some lived on the estate. Some came from a tidy way away, you know, Carmarthen and all that some people come to work from. They had their cars and that then, see, they had their own cars. But I only had to walk, I don't know if you know where the Fairfield is, no. Where are you from?

*20:54 Barry Island.*

Oh. My uncle lives up there. No you wouldn't know that then. But I only had to walk there, but see my granny was just by there... Yeah I've got an aunty living out in Barry. ??? estate somewhere she lives. It's a big place is't it?

*I haven't lived there for a while...I was going to ask you about wages then... Did you start on £5 a week?*

Yeah.

*And was that a basic wage, did you have piece work on top of that or was that...?*

That's just your basic no overtime, just £5. Yeah.

*So, there was no overtime when you started working there?*

Don't think so, no.

*Did the factory used to shut on the weekend?*

We'll as I was saying, I can't remember much but I know that after I had left they started working nights... so I don't know... I don't think they were working on a Saturday and Sunday unless they needed stuff and they had people in. But I never worked Saturday and Sunday I know that.

*Did you have pay rise while you were there?*

No. I was only there just over a year and a half and I think I was on the same money all the time. I think I had £5 for over a year and a half.

*So, what did you do with that £5 then?*

I used to give my mother £4 and a £1 for myself.

*So that was for your keep was it?*

Yeah.



*What did you do with that £1?*

Oh we'd go up to Forzani's Café up by the town by there. We'd have a bottle of coke, me and my friend and we thought we was it then, you know, with our bottle of coke. And we put the Jukebox on and play records... [laughs] oh, it went further those days didn't it? I bet you could get about two cokes out of that, or three most probably. And my mother used to supply me with what I needed, you know, stockings and whatever I wanted. It was just a bit of pocket money for me, that's all. She bought all my food, my clothes. But I just felt independent then because I was earning my own money, my father couldn't say he was keeping me.

*Did you used to go out in those days or were you too young?*

Only up the café for some Coca Cola and listen to the records. My friend'd be nagging me all the time to come out, I'd say, "*I've got no money*".

*Did you used to buy records?*

No. You put the jukebox on, put money in and play records, like.

*You didn't buy records for home?*

Not then. I didn't have enough money then. I start buying records when I earned a bit more, when I was in a different job. I think the first one I bought was Rod Stewart or somebody. I remember buying a record, you know the little... I listen to songs now and listen to the oldies and well and I do think... you know everybody in those days didn't have much but they were happy weren't they? They've got everything today haven't they? I mean they ask for Christmas, computers and... I was the last one in the street to have a telephone, I was. I don't like debt, I don't like bills and when I had a little job then, minding an old woman I thought I'll have telephone. And that's what I had and she died about 109, good age mind isn't it? But I still got the telephone now haven't I; you've got to learn not to spend too much. So, I've had a few jobs like, before I got married and had children.

*24:30 Can I just ask you about holidays? Did you have any holidays when you were there?*

Holiday pay, like?

*Yeah. Do you remember any paid holidays, bank holidays?*

No. I might have had a day off for Easter Monday or something but I can't remember having any holidays, like a weeks holiday. No, we didn't have them then did we? Did they have holidays in those days? Might have had a day for every month or something like that... I'm not sure. I can't remember being on holiday, so long ago.

*So people didn't have to take, like the miners holiday, like the fortnight in the summer. You could choose holidays...? You don't remember?*

No I can't remember. No.

*What about a Union? Was there a Union there?*

There must have been some sort of Union there. I remember I was paying a stamp and tax and all that. There must have been some sort of Union there for people if they were treated wrong. I can't remember, see, because I was so young. Plus I wasn't interested in things like that. I don't know. But no the older ones most probably knew

more, the ones who had been there longer than me. I don't know... I can't remember much.

*So there was...*

Well the factory was full.

*They were quite different ages then?*

All different ages, yeah.

*Some quite older then?*

To me like. I mean when you are young you think other people are old, but they're not though, but to me they felt old because I was young. All my teachers at school felt old. But they wasn't really. But it was all full, plenty workers there, you know. There would be a big line then, I remember on a Friday waiting to get your pay. All different ages. I think I was the youngest one there...

*So you would queue up to get your pay on a Friday would you?*

Yeah.

*Was that at the end of the day or at lunchtime?*

On the Friday when we finished work.

*When you finished work?*

Yeah. We'd all be queuing up for our pay.

*26:42 So these older women, they were married women and...?*

Most of them were married, yeah. Some of them had their daughters working there with them and things like that.

*That's interesting.*

But most of the supervisors were older, and saying that they must have been in their 30s or 40s. But they were old to me [laughs].

*So you left there then and you went to...?*

Well I stayed home for a couple of months to help my mother to look after the little girl and then I could get no dole obviously because I gave the job up myself. But the I had a job in the Wern then and I worked there for just over a year I think I did.

*So tell me about the Wern then?*

The Wern - I was on the oiler where the sheets come out. We had to pull them out and we put a sheet of paper on top of them and pull another one out and another like that. They would get boxed then, see, and sent away. One of my friends used to mess about and put the thing on fast speed. I was like this and some of them got scratched and we got told off. I think they were for the aeroplanes I think. I think they were doing them for the aeroplanes or something. And then one day the inspector said to "what have you been doing over here?" she said, on this inspecting job "there was supposed to be six of you turning this sheet" there was only her and me. I was on that side and she was on that side and I went to turn it and, they were that thick they were, and it slipped out my hand, my glove and caught my neck and she went white. She went 'quick... "what's the matter?" blood was spouting all over me now and she said

*“quick go to the nurse”* I said *“I’m alright”*. Well I had four stitches by there, see. We shouldn’t have been on there really. But because I was having a job then going away in Devon, I had to have my stitches taken out before time because I was going away. They took them out for me and I landed up in Devon working the, after that. I worked in Devon then for a while.

*28:41 Tell me a little bit more about the Wern - how did you get the job?*

Um, did we look in the job centre. I’m not sure. It must have been in the job centre, or the dole, because I couldn’t have dole I know that, they said, because I gave the job up myself. But whether the dole said there’s jobs going, because there wasn’t only me there was somebody else, there were a couple of us from around here. We had to wait for a bus by there.

*So did you go together?*

Yeah we all waited on the verge just by there and the bus would pick us up and take us.

*I mean for the interview?*

Oh, the interview. No, I think... I don’t remember having an interview. Whether the job centre sent up and they started us, I can’t remember much about that. But I know there was a few of us from my school that worked there.

*So you knew quite a few people?*

Yes. I knew quite a few there but there was a bus, you had to catch a bus, and if we were late or missed it we’d had it hadn’t we?

*So when did you have to leave home in the morning, when did you have to be in?*

We had to be at the bus stop before half past 8 something like that. I think we started at 9.

*31:10 It’s over Neath way see. There would be about six of us being picked up and some from the next stop, some from by here.*

*And so you knew people?*

Yes, I knew a lot of people there. Yeah, knew a lot of people there.

*Were there some from the old factory there?*

No, nobody there.

*Just people from school then?*

People that I knew, like the woman next door, she used to work there a couple from another street, older than me see and we used to wait down thereon the bus and, oh, we had a surprise one day. There was a naked man running down the street, oh, we couldn’t wait for that bus to come in to get on there. Something had happened to him and he started stripping all his clothes off. The girl that was supposed to get on the bus further on came running up to our bus stop and we said, *“what’s the matter”*, *“there’s a man stripping off”*, coloured fella he was, *“coming all the way down”* [laughs] we couldn’t do much all day, we were thinking of that naked man all the time. But when we went home and told my mother, *“what did he look like”* I said, *“we didn’t look”*

[laughs]. But I worked there for about a year and a bit and then my sister lived in Devon, see so she had a job for me out there up in the college.

*31:10 Before we go to Devon I just want to ask a few more things about Y Wern. So were you trained then, when you went to...*

No, no. there was just like a, what do you call them, foreman telling us what we had to do, and he would watch us for a minute. I picked it up easy I did. But the were greasy, slippery, you had to be careful. But this girl that was working there, she was courting one of the men working on it, see, and anything she said would go because it was her boyfriend, and the buggger went and put the machine on fast, to teach us a lesson and all the sheets got scratched and we a row, didn't we. It was her fault, when they finished then he was telling her offal the time he was. He'd go "Get and do that. Get and do that.". But no, I enjoyed it you know. We used to sit on the gantry; we used to sit on top of the boxes having a break and we would go outside and have a little break outside.

*So tell me about the breaks then. You used to get in in the morning at 9, did you have a morning tea break?*

We'd have a tea break. I remember going in the canteen for a cup of tea and toast, I remember having that. But my mother used to give me money, see, for food and I used to go on a diet and I wouldn't but any food. I didn't show her like, because I was always trying to loose weight. I'd be sitting out there and everybody would be eating and I'd have no food. I'd go home and she'd say "Maureen there's two doughnuts in the cupboard" and I would try and run upstairs not to see them, and she'd bought them for me and I'd come down and eat them then. I'd say, "don't buy me cakes no more, now", I've been try to diet since I was 15. Always loosing weight. The most I put on when I gave up smoking, put on about 5 stone.

*So when was your lunch break and how much did you have for it?*

I think it was about 12 o'clock till 1 I think it was, or was it 1 till 2, not sure. We worked afternoon shift as well sometimes. We go in on the afternoon shift and finish about 10. It was either 2 till 10 or in the morning till 2.

*Oh, I see. There were shifts then.*

Yeah. Some did till 2 or 2 till 10.

*So did you work alternate weeks, different shifts?*

I think it would be one week in the mornings and week of afternoons.

*And which did you prefer?*

Well the afternoons really. Because you didn't have to get up too early in the morning, did you. But morning shift then, at least you knew once you were home you had the afternoon off then.

*So you were doing this job when you got there. Did you do the same job all the time you were there?*

Sometimes if they were short they would put you on another job to do.

*What was that then?*

They put me on one job where, where the sheets were getting cut, and all the strips of metal would fall on the floor, I had to pick that up. I picked it up one day and the blimmin' sheet came out and hit me in the nose, I didn't know what was what, it was a new job to me. As I bent down the sheet came up and hit me in the nose, didn't hurt me, just saying there could have been a nasty accident. But it was my fault because I didn't expect the sheet to come out like that, I wasn't looking. So I just had to pick up the scrap metal. Then they put me on another job, where they were packing the circles into boxes, putting bits of paper in and packing them. But there was only one inspector over there and there should have been six, three on each side turning them. There was only me and her and it slipped on my glove and, only the corner nicked me by there, but I had for stitches... I don't know if I could have claimed because I shouldn't have been on there see. But you don't think do you.

*35:00 So, do you think the job was dangerous, though?*

If there was not the right amount of people working on there, yes. Because there should have been six on there turning them and there was only two of us. But as long as you open your eyes open and keep careful you're alright. If you're fooling around you could have a nasty accident because a sheet could come out and hit you in the face or nose if you're not looking. But there was always men around on the gantry's pulling up the boxes, there was always somebody around watching you.

*Did they give you an overall...?*

Um... I think we could wear our own there, I'm sure we could. I think I remember having little nylon one with pockets. I can't remember wearing an overall there, no I don't think we did, we had our own.

*And they didn't give you any protective clothing did they?*

No, I don't think so. You could wear gloves if you wanted gloves on.

*But they didn't give you anything?*

Saying that, you know, I don't know if I had an overall there, from the factory like. Can I remember them all being in a certain colour? I don't know. I think we all had our own, I'm sure we did.

*But they didn't give you gloves or shoes or something?*

No. We had the rubber gloves when we were turning those big heavy sheets, like I told you, like the council do it, and it slipped right through there and hit my neck. But on the oiler its self, I'm not sure. Did we have cloth on there? We had to pull sheets out like that and then put the paper like tat so who ever was the fastest put the paper on or some that were a bit slow put the paper on. I think I was better at putting the paper on as they were coming out like that. And then we put them all together like that then box them all then. Say "Stop" to the oiler if any more sheets come out. And then we'd put them in the boxes and they would go off again then. I think they were for aeroplanes, I'm sure. Or for something, they must have been doing them for something. Never took much interest what they were for really. But they must have been for some sort of thing they were making, they mustn't be damaged or scratched. Perhaps they were gong to the Abby. I don't know. To make things down there. But as I said that was another factory, and I've always wanted to work in a sweet shop [laughs].

*Where you aware of any accidents while you were there, apart from yours?*  
No. I hadn't seen any accidents there, no. I haven't seen nothing happen there.

*37:40 So how much were you paid a week?*

I had a bit more than £5 but I can't remember exactly how much. It couldn't have been much more because it wasn't far after. Could have been £8 a week, £9, but I can't remember much about the pay there. But I remember, Johnsons, my first job, I remember that was a fiver. Might have been about £8 or £10 a week. The most pay I ever earned, when I was... where did I work? I went away to work - that was wasn't much, £30 a month, when I worked in the college because all the food was in and everything, that was just for pocket money, £30. But I think the most I ever had was down Merlin's working down the factory on the estate, and £40 a week I had. That's my highest wage, see.

*And when was that?*

That was about... how old was Nathan...? about 25 years ago. When I just had my grandson, I was working down there and I had £40 a week. That was the highest job I had.

*So what did Merlin's make?*

Well we had to pack these car kits and sponges. You know these sponges in the sea, whatever they call them. They're dear to buy them because they're made out of special stuff, you know bath sponges.

*Loofahs?*

Loofahs, but they... we had to pack them, gift sets we'd pack, all sorts of gift sets and things like that... But that was only a temporary job because they were finishing them all the time, when they had work and when the didn't have work. And we were doing car kits and everything see.

*I just want to go back to Wern then. Was there a Union there?*

I suppose there was. I suppose there was a Union. But I wasn't in the jobs long enough to know anything see.

*So you weren't a member then?*

No. I don't think so.

*Do you remember any holidays and stuff there?*

Um... D'you know my minds gone blank, I can't... can't remember if I had holidays or what. I don't know. Might have had a weeks in July, I don't know see. I can't remember, honestly I can't.

*What was it like then, the camaraderie and stuff like with the other women, was it a good place to work?*

Yeah, I got on with them all. I got on with all of them there you know.

*You were a bit older then, did you used to go out?*

Yes. I was about 17 then see, so a couple of years older like... My mother was very strict see, we had to be in by 10. And, we would go up there...

*Up where now?*  
Up Forzani's café.

*40:20 To the café again?*

So we would go to the Café, we'd hang around in the café, see? And then, I don't even think we went to the pictures or anything, oh Saturday morning we had the pictures didn't we. But no, only the café every night, my friend used to live round the corner, "come on lets go up the café", bottle of coke again, and the music and the dancing... we went up there once all dolled up, we thought we were dolled up in these suits, sitting down [laughs]. I'm laughing now because I can remember what it was like, funny. This man sat by us and he said, "you mind if I sit by here" and all the seats were empty. I said, "No"... we couldn't stop laughing we thought "Why has he sat by us with all the seats...". But I had like, a brown suit on with a curly golden frill by there and she had the same in orange. My mother only went and ironed the front straight... we though we were lovely in these suits [laughs] they're horrible now when I think of it. No, we only went up there really, at that age like. But after I went to Devon I went everywhere.

*Did you go out for social evenings? Where there any kind of works parties or Christmas parties?*

I never went to none of them even if there was. I know what you mean like when they have an annual party. No. Perhaps, as I was saying we were too young to drink, if it was a drinking party, we were under 18 weren't we. We were too young to drink at the time... I don't remember being invited to any.

*Where there trips or anything from work?*

No. Nothing like that. I didn't go on, no.

*Do you think they were good employers?*

Well as I said, I got on all right there. I got on with everybody, but you don't normally see the bosses, really, in the factory... the workers, the men there and all that is all you see there.

*What were the conditions like, you know like the toilets and...?*

They were all right. The canteen was lovely for the food; everything was nice by there.

*You said you were a smoker; were you allowed to smoke on the factory floor?*

I wasn't a smoker then. No, I didn't smoke until I was 18. When I did then I couldn't give them up until I was 45. But I've given them up now see. If I'd had a fag I wouldn't have been so fat, I would have been smoking instead of eating wouldn't I. But the others used to smoke, they used to go outside the factory and have a fag see.

*So they weren't allowed to smoke on the factory floor?*

No, no, no. Only out side, I think you could smoke if you were in the canteen, you must have been able to smoke there.

*43:18 What about the toilets?*

I suppose you could smoke in there at the time, there wasn't a ban on smoking in there. But I remember we used to go outside and we used to sit on the boxes. My

friend used to smoke and have a fag, nagging me to have one and I used to say no “*I don’t want one*” I was silly then when I did start smoking then. She gave me one to try once and I was feeling all giddy and I got used to the taste then and I started smoking then didn’t I. Mad. My son didn’t smoke until he was 18, my other son was smoking but he didn’t then he started smoking. Do you smoke?

No.

Horrible habit to get out of. Giving up food is bad enough but giving up smoking was worse. Really hard. But I’d never go back to it now, I’ve given up 22 years now. He gave them up about 12 years. My other son gave them up, he put on weight. My daughter never touched one. She wouldn’t even go over the shop for one she wouldn’t...

*So tell me, did you keep in touch with people from work when you left?*

No, no. Only the one I told you, the one that worked away with me. She used to work in Johnsons. I see her often in town. She moved from where she was down round this area, I see her a lot and sometimes I see people I haven’t seen for years and then you see them all the time them... Don’t see them for years and you see them... and loads of people have died, people in school with me have died. I can’t believe it you know.

*So how do you feel about the few years you spent working in the factories?*

Well I had to think back about it and I had to think... like when you’re in school we want to leave don’t we, and then we’re sorry then, missing in when you’re in work and you think “*I wish I didn’t have to work*” But when you’re not working you’d rather be working. So I go over to my friends three time a week and do a bit of cleaning for her because she’s disabled. Otherwise I’d go cuckoo if I was stuck in the house all day long. That’s why I said I’m never in, I’m either doing the shoe boxes or helping with them and things like that, I’m knitting all the time, I do a lot of knitting. But if I’ve got nothing to do ooo ??? (45:52 – 45:54) [laughs]...

*So you’ve got fond memories of working in the factories?*

Yes. I wish we’d had photos taken you know, to show you. I was talking to my friend today, she worked in the metal box, I said, “*do you want me to send somebody over to you?*” “*Oh, no.*” she said, and she’s got a photo of her in the metal box with somebody when she was 20. I said, “*let me send somebody over to you*”, “*No*” she said. She’s disabled see... she’s only 72, 73 and it’s like some... her hand flop like that and they just hang. She’s a lovely person she is. But, you know, things happen to people don’t they, and that’s the way life is, isn’t it... I mean I can’t grumble I get around, my knee hurts me a bit but apart from that I’m all right... [laughs.]

46:51

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD