

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

OP Chocolate Factory – Merthyr Tudful, Hoover - Pentrebach

Interviewee: VSE053 Betty Probert

Date: 30/4/14

Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of Women's Archive of Wales/Archif Menywod Cymru

Can you tell me your name and your date of birth?

Betty Probert. 17 July 1930

Tell me a little bit about your background. Your mother and your father, what they did for a living? Whether you had brothers or sisters.

Well we all lived together. Aunt, uncle, cousins. All one big family. We were about twelve or thirteen. My grandmother was the boss. There was my aunty and uncle and their children and then my mother, then my sister. My father and, they were parted, so it was only us two. That's how we lived now and it has come down to me, the last one. We'd all been together.

So did your mother, I know she worked in the home, but did she work?

Yes she worked in Bridgend. During the War she worked in the factory in Bridgend. She came to work in the chocolate factory as a cleaner. That was all the work she done.

Do you remember her working in Bridgend?

Yes, going to work about three o'clock in the morning, down on the train. She wasn't doing the dangerous work, with the bombs. She wasn't on that. She used to tell us what she used to do because they, my aunt went with her and they were going down in the mornings to Bridgend for work. Then she came to the chocolate factory. That's all she really done in work.

So were you brought up in Heolgerrig?

No in Pen yard, no that's where I was born and my twin sister of course. I was two pound and she was a pound and a half born. That's our weight. No incubators in those days, just in cotton wool for about a month because we were eight months babies, so we were wrapped in cotton wool, not bathed for a month. Then we grew up and come to the size we are now!

Tell me about your education. Where did you go to school?

Abermorlais was the first one, except for the three your olds, that was in Brecon Road. Then we went to Abermorlais school and then I went to Queens' Road school and then from there to work.

So Queen's Road was a secondary school was it?

Yes, but not liked the Castle o the county. I didn't have exams. We did have exams I school but it wasn't where you had a uniform and all that. Very nice school, we enjoyed it. I loved school.

When did you leave school?

When I was sixteen.

Would you have liked to have stayed on?

I think I would. Yes I think I might have because I had no clue whatsoever what I wanted to do at work, really..

What did you like about school?

I liked everything about it. Like I liked work. I liked going to work. We were there eight hours a day and we were spending our time there in work. We enjoyed the . . . Yea.

Tell me then where did you go and work first of all?

The chocolate factory. I was sixteen then.

Did you have to have an interview for that?

Yes. I can't remember much about it mind and I was there eight years.

Did you know someone in the chocolate factory when you went to work there?

No. I can't remember, unless they came round the school that they wanted people in there. I can't remember no but that's where I went first then.

And your sister was a twin wasn't she?

Yes.

Did she go to the chocolate factory with you?

Yes she came to the chocolate factory with me.

Did you start at the same time?

No I started in December and my sister started in February, I think.

Did she leave school the same time as you?

Yes. She went to work in town, in a milliners department. Which she loved very, very much. She loved doing that. They were foreigners and they went to Cardiff, to Rhiwbina. I think the gentleman had a belt factory down there. I'm not sure. She could have gone down there. They wanted her to go down there to work, but she liked doing hats. So she came then to the factory when she finished with them.

When you went to the factory, you had an interview, but were you trained for the job? Did you have to have training?

Well it was packing chocolate bars and all that. I was in that department and the boss's wife used to come up at about nine o'clock of a morning and she'd sit then, chatting away and we were working packing away as well with us.

So straight in was it?

Yes, yes.

Do you remember what time you started in the morning?

6.20 I think it was seven o'clock. Yes I think it was seven and then we finished about six o'clock, I think it was.

That was a long day wasn't it?

No it was six o'clock if we worked on, sorry and buses up here were only going quarter past. We had to hurry then to town to catch it.

So you caught the bus to go there did you?

Yes

What time did the bus go in the morning?

It must have been half past seven. I'm not sure. Whatever job I had I was up early. It wouldn't be nine or anything like that. It would be around seven to half past I should imagine. Can't remember that much.

Tell me about the chocolate factory. Go through a day with me.

Well I was in the packing department working and then they used to have a lift going down to the basement where they were making the chocolate and they were putting trays on the lift to come up to our department which we used take off. And then we'd be on the table then with the wrapping paper and so forth, packing bars of chocolate.

Did you do this every day you were there?

Yes. Sometimes we had to go down to the basement to help them on the line down there. They would want dome girls to help them down there or we had to go to the sweet department, with the boiled sweets an all. I didn't care much for that job because they had big, big trays. They would be huge like that and you'd be lifting them. The sweets would be falling, cooling and you had to lift them and you had to take them to a place to cool and they could be awkward rather than heavy. We stuck that for a good while. When we had to go it was us that was going and I said to my friend one day, we don't want to do this. We went into the boss and sorted it out and I said the work was heavy. We did mention it that one girl there had a bad back. Oh no they said she was born with that. I said to Olga I think we'll try and get in with Hoover's. She asked her cousin who was working in Hoover's. She had a reply saying to start and come down for an interview. I just bought in myself and I had no vacancies then but my cousin was working there and I went down to him in Aberfan and he went in the office the following day and asked for me. Then I had the interview that week. So you see it was all by asking.

Before we of on to Hoover's, I'd like to talk a bit more about the chocolate factory. Do you remember what our wages were when you started?

Four pound I think it was. Yes roughly that.

A week in the chocolate factory. How many people worked there?

I can't remember.

Was it a big factory?

Yes, very big. It was a brewery that they'd turned into a chocolate factory, so it was a big building. It's moved out of Dowlais now, but the building is still there. I don't think

anybody works there now, I'm not sure about that. We had these departments to go to. Yes that's what the wages were – four pounds.

How many of you were women that worked there?

In my department?

No in the whole factory.

I wouldn't know, because there was a biscuit department, there was a basement department, there was a packing department and that.

So you didn't mix a lot with the other departments, did you?

Only when we went to work with them or in the canteen when we had our food in the canteen, we'd see our friends then.

So tell me about the facilities there. You said there was a canteen.

A canteen, yes.

What kind of place was that then?

Alright, alright

Did you used to eat there?

Yes. Sometimes we'd take sandwiches and have dinner when we come home. Or sometimes we'd have dinner there

What about your breaks then? Do you remember what your breaks were?

I think we had a break at nine o'clock and then the dinner time. I think we had about ten minutes at three. I'm not quite sure. I think it was about a quarter past five and then working on it would be about quarter to six.

Was the lunch break an hour? Dinner break and hour?

I think so.

What about the other facilities, toilets and all that?

They were all nice. Everything was nice and clean and everything.

Describe the factory to me then. You were in the packing department then.

What were the conditions like? Was it warm or cold?

It was quite alright. Downstairs was where they packed all the chocolate and the men would go on the lorries. Then going up the stairs to our department, three or four toilets and another little room where we'd get the labels and all that. Yes I was quite nice, we were never cold, it was quite comfortable.

What about the lights?

The lighting was alright

What kind of lighting was it? Do you remember?

No I can't remember. I don't remember it being dark unless it was winter time. Upstairs where we were, but the basement was a big place where they made the chocolate and the conveyor belt then with all the chocolate or whatever was coming down. Then we'd go to the biscuit factory and you know the wafer that you used to have on ice cream, well they came off in a big sheet. You'd be sitting by the machine and you had a big knife and cut the edges. That was for the biscuits. They wafer biscuits that they'd make.

What about the smell there? Was it a powerful smell?

No. White overalls we had. We got them ourselves. We washed our own overalls. Eat as much as you want to! You could if you wanted to. No, No everything was always nice and clean and whatsaname.

That was a perk of working there was it?

Yes, yes.

Did they used to sell you chocolates cheaply as well?

Yes. We had broken biscuits in bags or whatever and marshmallows they used to make there. Oh yes it was nice. We'd eat what we wanted not eating all the time, we didn't want that but if you felt like a little bit of chocolate you'd have that.

Was there a Union in the factory, in the chocolate factory and were you a member?

Yes, yes, oh yes.

Do you remember what Union it was?

No, no. I know the gentleman who was the Union man. He was from up where I was born. We had a Union yes. The Union was in with me when we refused to go and do this job.

Yes. Ok. Tell me about any dispute then.

They didn't say anything when we refused. They just went and asked two other girls and they went instead of us. That's all. Then we decided when we were talking, my friend and I that we had had enough. In fairness, it was a shame really because apart from that we would have been there until it closed.

15.51 Were you ever a kind of an official in the Union?

Oh No!

Do you remember any other disputes then?

No, No. Everything was quite happy. No I can't remember any disputes like that, in fairness.

Tell me when you used to pack, tell me what you used to do when you packed the chocolates.

Well we'd be sitting round the table and a friend of mine, perhaps she'd seen a film the night before she'd be talking about the film and we'd be enjoying ourselves. Now the boss's wife she used to enjoy it as well. She never said anything but I think she enjoyed it. She never stopped us talking anyway. I think we were about sixteen there in that room. No we were all happy.

So you were allowed to talk?

Oh yes, and we'd ask the lady in charge of us if we could have the nine o'clock records on. So she'd go down to the office and put them on for us. We'd have the music on then.

Do you remember what they were?

Oh what was it called? It used to start about nine o'clock in the morning. Requests it used to be. Sometimes we used to be singing, or listening. I used to say, 'Olive, can we have

the wireless on?’ She’d go down to the office and then they would put it on. It was really a happy atmosphere to be honest with you. Like home. They were a family of Austrians, or wherever they came from. We did enjoy ourselves.

18.00 Do you remember any of the special songs?

No, no.

Tell me you used to do something else when you were packing didn’t you? Tell me about the notes you used to put in.

We would know that the batch we were doing in the tray was going to these countries, so we would write a little note. ‘

If married, pass us by. If single, please reply.’

I did have a reply and my sister had a reply. But the one I had was also a sailor. I can’t remember his name now or anything like that. It didn’t last long, but hers did.

18.58 So your sister had a reply from who? What was he?

Merchant Navy, I think. Is it the Merchant when they are in white? Merchant seaman he was.

And from where?

Holland.

Did she meet this man?

Yes he came over and met her and he took her back to Holland. I think it was for a week’s holiday with him. She met his family.

Did anything come of it?

No, no. Oh I can’t remember his name.

And this was all from putting a note in the chocolates.

Yes, yes, that’s right

Did any of the other girls get replies?

I can’t remember. I think some of them must have. Some of them were courting and didn’t bother, but us single girls would do it. Yes it was funny, we would often put in. I remember the bosses would come up one day, we used to have a feather duster, to dust the chocolate. He would come up, up the stairs and he would come up with this big bar of chocolate and the wrapper open and said that in the wrapper there was a feather. It had come off! He went like this. None of us could say who done it because we didn’t know that there was a feather caught. We had a smile about that with a feather in it. So somebody must have sent a report about the feather in the chocolate. Nothing came of it but he just came probably to tell us to be careful with the feather. We did smile. The girls got really happy

What was the factory called, by the way?

Opie. Because the boss’s name was Oscar Preschig, I think. So his name was on

OP’s chocolate?

Yes. I don’t know if the name is still up there. I was up in Dowlais yesterday. They had a place in Dowlais anyway, but then they moved to Dowlais. All of them went to Dowlais then because, well I can’t remember what happened to the chocolate factory. Whether it was pulled down, because that was the brewery at one time.

21.24 So where was the chocolate factory when you worked there?

Well just off the main road in Merthyr, it was a brewery.

Was the work dangerous in any way? I know you said someone had a bad back.

No, no. My sister was working down stairs and she helped to load the vans with the biscuit tins. You know the biscuit tins they have and then they brought this trolley, this electric trolley. She was out in the yard practising to use it, you know. It came back and cut her leg open.

What happened to her then? Did she have to go to hospital?

Yes, she had to have stiches. You see it was electric. I can't remember how long she lost work. I don't think she lost it long, that was because she was practising up in the yard for that.

Did you have any compensation for that?

No. I don't think so unless she had her pay through loss of earnings. I can't really remember. No I suppose she would only have her wages.

But she was paid while she was off?

I think so, oh yes. Now when I finished, I had this interview in this other factory and it was Christmas time, so I came up to the factory then and put my notice in. I left then just over Christmas and they wouldn't pay me for Christmas Day or Boxing Day. But I didn't worry really, but I was told that if I'd gone to the whatsaname they would have had to pay me for Christmas Day and Boxing Day. No the manager, pone of the managers came up and said, *Betty you can finish tomorrow, before Christmas.* So I finished then and there

So if you had gone to the Union, they told you

Yes, I never thought of going to them.

Tell me about holidays while you were there. Did you have paid holidays in the summer? What did you have? How much time did you have?

Oh yes. Well I think we had a fortnight. I'm not sure. I think it was a fortnight in August and then we'd have the days off in Whitsun and whatsaname.

Did the factory used to shut down?

I think so, I'm not sure.

Like the miners'; holiday

That's right, oh yes, yes

Do you think they were good employers, you got on with them?

Oh yes, oh yes very much so, fair play.

Did you see the boss? Did he used to turn up? He was in the factory?

Oh yes, yes

Did you keep in touch with the girls you worked with, when you left?

They came to Hoover's! Which annoyed them very, very much. They didn't want to know the name Hoover's because most of us went there to work

How long were you there? Tell me how long

Eight years.

So you went to Hoover's
In 1954.

In 1954. Tell me about that then. Do you remember the interview?
Yes.

What did they ask you?

I can't remember, but they were very nice. There was a very nice superintendent from day one. We were his girls and he used to tell the men, *If you worked like my girls!* He used to live in Heolgerrig, he's died now.

What did you do at Hoover's?

What did I do first? Let me see now. We worked on the floor, doing parts for the machine.

Did you have to be trained for this

Well they showed us while we were there, naturally. We got into it straightaway then.

So there wasn't a period of a few week's training

No. Eventually then we went in, they built this place, four us went in, to the office we called it. It was a machine that, at the back of that now, there's a plate telling you the year and everything. We were doing the places for them. That had to be covered, not for the dust to come on the machine and. I was in there until I finished then.

The first machine your worked on, you were making parts for the machine. Tell me the parts you were making. What was the end product?

Well it was a plate that you put little things in and then you slotted them in the machine and they had a big reel and roll then and put all the numbers on it. When you finished that, either you or another friend would look through the numbers and see that they were all correct, put the feel the right way to be honest with you, because it would be backwards, wouldn't it? The numbers would be backwards, so we would look to see everything was alright and put them aside, and then they would go to the men on the line and they would rip them off and put them on the machines as they were coming down. Those little plates. I wish I had one now. Black tape it was and that would tell you what, lie they've got on the back of them to tell you when it was bought and what years, so they could always look back.

What was Hoover making at the time? You said before you did that you were making parts for the machine

29.22 Another job we were doing, we went up to London for a month to be shown it and then they brought the job down to Merthyr. There were about ten girls in a row and one would be ding one part and one would be. It was like to start the machine, right. You'd paint the lettering on that, pass it along then there would be little tin things that would be on there. You would wriggle them down and then there was a little silver thing that (?). That started the machine going.

What was the machine, was it a washing machine?

Yes,

What kind of washing machine?

Well it would be on all models, on all washing machines.

What kind of washing machine were they making when you first went there?

It was the Mark I

Tell me about the Mark I then

You had to use a roller for that.

A mangle was it?

Yes that's right. Then they eventually has one that was electric. I got one out there now. We had them as well as we've got out there. What else did we do? Well it was the machine, parts

Was it always washing machines in Merthyr?

30.26 Yes I think so Cambuslang had the irons, I'm not sure. And the cleaners were Cambuslang They were doing, but washing machines was what ours was, and tumble dryers and all that.

So when you started there they hadn't been there long had they?

I'm not sure. 1940 something, 1949 Or they built it in 1949. I wish I could remember how many what was there. A good couple of thousand there when it started

How many were there when you went there?

The full amount then. I can't remember

But a few thousand?

Oh yes

Was it mainly men or mainly women?

Mainly men

Did you work on the line at all?

I think I went on it about once, but it was on the assembly usually.

Were those mixed or were they mainly women?

The girls, we had a charge hand and a foreman and a superintendent then.

All girls

32.04 Right. We'd be a section there then a line there and a section where the machines went down

Tell me what it was like the first day you walked into Hoover's.

I can't remember.

It was quite a new building.

Oh yes.

Was it all mod cons?

Oh yes. Nice canteen and everything

What were the facilities then? Did you have toilets, rest rooms?

No we didn't have a restroom. There was a surgery there as well.

A surgery with a nurse?

Yes and the doctor would come every so often

Why would the doctor be there?

Well in case of accidents sometimes.

What about general health for the workforce?

Oh yes, 'cos I had an accident when I was there. A lid fell on my foot and I had about ten stitches across here. The mark is still there.

Did you have compensation for that?

Yes. A big amount, with instructions that I was not to apply ever again. I had sixty pounds. I don't suppose it was a lot these days. That's what I had. I had to go down to Cardiff to one of the offices down in Cardiff. Lyn came with me. They were there with their wigs on you know asking questions. How heavy was the thing, the lids and all that.

So when did that all happen?

Oh I can't remember. We were living over in Swansea Road then. I can't remember.

Were you a member of the union then?

Yes, oh yes.

What union was that?

Was it the Amalgamated Union, I'm not sure.

Were you involved in Union stuff?

No my friend was the shop steward

Was everybody in the factory a member?

Oh yes

Did they have to be a member of the Union?

I think so.

So did they look after you, the Union?

Oh yes, oh yes, in fairness

Did they negotiate the pay and stuff? Did you have to wear a uniform?

Yes we had a blue coat. I think mine is still upstairs. Just a blue overall. Yes the laundered them. In the chocolate factory we had to wash them ourselves. But in Hoovers' they were laundered.

Did Hoover's provide them?

Oh yes and I've still got it up there. Shall I go and have a look? I think I've got it behind the door.

Later perhaps. What kind of place was it? Do you remember what it is like inside?

Oh big, a big place, a very big place. Plenty of air and light.

What were the sounds and smells? Was it noisy there

No it was only in the machine shop when you passed going to the canteen. No it wasn't all that noisy I would say. We didn't have to shout our heads off.

Did you enjoy the work?

Oh I loved it.

What did you enjoy about it?

Oh I don't know. I just enjoyed doing it. You doing different things at some time so it wasn't boring at all because you were doing different machines.

So did you change jobs while you were there, you said?

I went to Perivale to bring this job down from Perivale. I was up there a week or a fortnight learning the job then we came down to our factory. Edith my sister was on the assembly and worked with me, but they took her and put her on the inspection department. So Edith come up there inspecting our work which was very nice, but she had to change her job then from inspector. She used to inspect our work, she was at the bottom of the line. She inspected the work that we were doing after.

Did you ever become a supervisor?

No, no

What about the women that worked there? Were you mainly single women or were you a mix?

Mixed

What about married women, they could carry on working?

Yes

What about women with children then? Did they used to come back to work?

I'm not sure, I think so, yes.

Were there any childcare facilities?

No, no

Can you remember how much you were paid when you went there?

Seven pounds odd then. It was four pounds in the chocolate factory, seven pound there.

That was very good wasn't it?

Yes. The of course we had a bonus. I can't remember what it was and then there was a monthly bonus; then Christmas time we would have a bonus. We couldn't really get over it and as I said the difference was there it was 'Would you like to work on tomorrow?' or 'Can you work on tomorrow?'

What would they do in the chocolate factory then?

You are working on tonight!

They just told you then. So you think you were well treated in Hoover's?

Oh yes. The chocolate factory was a family

Did your wages go up every year then, in Hoover's?

Yes when we had a rise

What did you do with your wages because you were quite young when you started? Did you used to give them to your mother?

Yes, yes. Not all. How can I say now. I give my aunt two pound and have tow pound myself. That was the four pound we had in whatsaname. We had bigger wages then when we went.

What id you used to do with your seven pounds then?

Save it. In Hoover's the Halifax, or the TSB came around wanting to know if we wanted to save, so I joined the Halifax then and the TSB and our savings went in that then.

Did they provide a pension for you as well?

Oh yes,

Did you get a pension when you left?

Oh yes.

Very good. Were you all paid a basic rate with a bonus. Did you know how much the other workers were paid?

The same yes.

What did you spend your wage packet on?

Well I paid my aunt, then I put away for my clothes and holidays.

Records as well?

Yes, but holidays mostly

41.14 Were there any perks from working in Hoover's?

Well yes, we'd have a monthly bonus and if you had been there, not sure whether it was five or ten years, I've got to go back to the old money – you'd have five shillings rise, extra. Then it came after, in fairness, you didn't have to wait five years, you'd have it sooner. But compared to Opie that was a godsend from what we had anyway.

What about the washing machines? Could you buy them cheaper?

Yes

Did you have a washing machine?

Yes, yes. A tumble drier I had. A Hoover I've got now to be honest with you. Oh yes, cleaners. You could have so many cleaners and I can go down the factory now if I want to, to get anything.

Can you?

Yes. I don't know how much difference there is now but it was a big difference when we were in work.

How much difference?

I can't remember to be honest with you. My sister got the cards up there somewhere. My sister never threw anything away, not even a matchstick! She kept everything. That's why I know that the one photo I would have liked to loan you I know is somewhere here, but I haven't come across it.

Have you got your sister's stuff?

Yes, yes.

Can I just ask you then were the men paid more than you?

Oh yes, I think so.

How did you feel about that?

No because we had equal pay then didn't we?

Do you remember that strike? Do you remember that whole equal pay thing?

Yes.

What happened then?

Our convenor wasn't very happy for women to have equal pay because now we worked on this machine as such, for the labels and one of the Union men, a young fellow he was. He said to my friend, 'I think as you are working on a machine you should have. There were women working in the machine shop and all of them were small, never saw a big one and they got these massive machines, pulling up and down. At one time, it wasn't a strike, we didn't have work and we had to go up to Dowlais and pack some of the work. Well these ladies stayed in the factory working and somebody said, 'You've got girls working down there. You go onto the big machines if you want to.' He wouldn't because they were all short ladies and they would be up like that, pulling the machines up and down. Because one of my friends up there was working there. They were the only ones that were working at the time. Our convenor did not like it all about us going for equal pay.

How did you feel about it?

Well yes, yes

How did most of the women feel about it?

O they were all for it of course. Did you see that programme Dagenham Girls? That was shot in the factory. Instead of the machines going round they had those of cars. I was going. 'Look where we were!' We knew the place.

Do you remember being aware of the Dagenham Girls when you were in Hoover?

No, No I've got to be honest with you. No until that programme come out, it was very interesting. Then that's right, this Union man said to my friend, 'I think you should have extra.' And he goes in front of our convenor and he said, 'No. No no, no way! I'll have the factory out, walking up the road.' He told us, if we done that. But of course we did. I forget what happened one time, there was a dispute of some kind and we were walking up the road. It was something to do with the men. Betty didn't want to. She said, 'Walk on your own.' But that's what he said, 'The factory out!' The Union lady, she was very, very good. She was all for it of course.

Who's that? Do you remember?

I can't remember. She was very nice. English girl she was. She was all in it.

Was the canteen there for everybody? Everybody used the same canteen.

Yes, yes.

What about the other facilities? Were they good at Hoover's?

Yes we had, we could go down and play tennis. We had a Sybil Marks team from Cardiff, with a dancing team. They used to come up doing dances. We used to have dancing lessons. Table tennis we used to play. Lovely big sports, they were wonderful, they would all come down from Cambuslang and Perivale and other sports there.

Tell me about Sports Day then. When was it held?

Well in the summer. They would come down and compete.

So did all the factories compete against each other?

Oh yes. It wasn't only Hoover's there were other factories there competing. Dances, we had lovely dances down there. Lovely dances

Were these arranged by the management, the dances?

No, a committee that was, the sports committee, I think.

So did you have a sports and entertainment committee?

Oh yes, yes.

The dances, were they held at Hoover's?

Oh yes.

Where were they held?

In the canteen. In fact I still goes over, once a month and go on holiday with them and all that. Once a month we go and then. We were in the canteen at Hoover's but they were taken over and there are one or two people working there. I'm not sure, because a friend of mine was working by the, with the telephones there. I don't know quite what they do there. Yes once a month, we were in the canteen, but we had to move then so now we are over in Pentrebach, in one of the clubs. Cricket Club and we go once a month and have concerts and I'm going on holiday with them now in July.

Did you have live music in these dances? Did you have a band there?

Yes.

Do you remember who they were

No I can't remember who the band were, to be honest with you now. We had lovely artistes when we had concerts. We had quite nice artistes there.

Did they have the concerts in the canteen as well?

We did do, but now we are over in the Cricket Club.

Did you used to have big names there?

We don't have big names now but we did. Let me see now – Dicky Valentine was there and he got killed going back home in Abergavenny, from there. There was another one then, he's got a band now. He was regular there. I can't remember his name but he was singing on ships but he's got a band of his own now and he was often there – Jeff Cooper! Lovely singer!

Did you used to have Christmas parties as well?

Yes.

And were they in the canteen?

Yes.

And did you used to go anywhere else

We have a Christmas dinner now in the Club. We used to have our Christmas dinners in the canteen

Dinner and dance?

Yes

Did most of the people used to go?

Oh yes. We had to be looking for our tickets. Don't forget our tickets, you know to get in.

With friends and partners as well?

Oh yes.

So it was more than Hoover's?

Oh yes, oh yes.

It must have been a big canteen

Yes it was a lovely canteen and the floor was nice. We miss it mind going to the canteen. We felt it was still part of Hoover's when you went even to a concert. We still go and I'm going on holiday with them. Oh yes, we've had really good times there. It was, that and Thorns , was Merthyr really.

Tell me about going back to work a bit. Did you used to talk while you were working?

Oh yes. We were allowed to talk and smoke.

You could smoke when you were working?

Yes, not that I did. I was never a big smoker. I used to smoke in company more than anything. When we went up the Pant it stopped.

People could smoke on the factory floor around where you worked?

Yes that's right

Do you think anyone suffered long term health effects from working in the factory

I don't think so. It was lovely and airy, they had fans going. No it was nice

How did the women workers treat their fellow male workers?

Alright.

Was there any sort of banter and that sort of thing?

No I don't think so. Every Friday there used to be a shop, a sweet shop opposite and we'd all go over and get sweets. The men would come round then with a bag and we'd share our sweets. And they'd do the same sometimes.

What about harassment? Was there any harassment?

No, no.

Now tell me about your holidays in Hoover then. How many days a week did you work? Was it five days a week?

No it was Saturday mornings sometime if there was overtime

There was overtime. What about shift work? Did you work shifts?

Yes I worked nights at one time. I can't remember why. Yes I worked nights once. It was alright but I preferred the day.

Did you have to clock in and off?

Yes

And what were your usual hours then? Say if you were working days do you remember what your hours were?

No. Well nine to five I thought. No we used to go down on the seven to half past bus. It must have been seven o'clock we used to start then

So you used to catch a bus there then?

Yes to Merthyr then we'd get a bus to Pentrebach

Where were you living when you were there?

I started off in Swansea Road.

So you clocked in and off and you worked overtime then?

Oh yes

Could you work in the evening, as well as overtime on a Saturday morning?

Yes. In the evening as well, til six

Do you remember what your breaks were during the day?

Well I think we'd have a quarter of an hour at nine o'clock. I think it was an hour dinner time and then three o'clock we'd have a break, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour then.

Did you have an annual paid holiday?

We were paid every holiday. We had one every year.

Could you choose your holiday?

No it was the factory fortnight they used to call it.

55.53 The factory shut again did it. So tell me about your holiday. You had a paid holiday and it was a fortnight was it? Where did you go on holiday?

First of all we went to Spain, Greece. Many times to Greece.

And this was in the Fifties?

Yes, Yes. When we went to Majorca, it was forty-two pound for a fortnight, bed and breakfast and an evening meal!

Do you remember what year that was?

I think we started going in 1954. I'm sure. It was every other year then and we'd go in this country and the weather was bad. My sister wouldn't come in this country she'd

rather go abroad. We went one year, I can't remember where it is now. Where the canals are. I can't remember now

Amsterdam?

No in this country then. And it rained for the fortnight we were there and we said, 'That's enough! We'll go abroad every year.' So we went every year abroad then.

**Right. Tell me you went to Majorca. What was it like when you went there?
When you started going there?**

Well first of all the plane we went on had four propellers. It was very noisy and we sucked sweets so for your ears not to, you know. The we went to Greece a lot and cruises.

Did you go from Cardiff?

No, no, Heathrow then. Cardiff wasn't open. Greece. Russia we went. We had the plane from Cardiff then to Russian. Then we went on the continent and we went on cruises then. We went to Norway. That was our holiday. Then we went, I had relatives in Canada. We used to go to Canada and from there then we went on the Alaska cruise from Canada.

You went to Alaska?

Yes, yes, lovely. We had relatives in Vancouver and we used to go from Vancouver. That's where you'd pick the ship up. Lovely.

So how many of you used to go on these holidays?

Me and my sister, just the four of us. I haven't been this year, away, abroad. I go on cruises when we do go.

Was there a good camaraderie in the factory between the women?

Yes.

Did you have lots of friends?

Yes, yes

And did you keep in touch when you left?

Well I see them often in town. I haven't seen Sylvia for a while. I used to see her in town, but I haven't seen her for a good while. Sheila I see sometimes. Sheila doesn't live far from us. She lives in Arthur Park, by there, in a bungalow, Sheila does.

So you still go to the Cricket Club?

Yes

And that's where everything is held now?

Yes

Is there a good gang of you that still go there then?

Yes, yes

Because Hoover closed a while ago now didn't it

Yes. Well we're going on holiday and I think we'll be about thirty-three

So how do you go on holiday now?

With the bus we'll be going. Weymouth we'll be going this year

Do you every go abroad now?

No I haven't been abroad now, couple of years now. Cruises we started going after because we were going different places. As I told you Hong Kong and Singapore. That was our leaving gift to ourselves. We went for three weeks there.

Tell me, talking about leaving. How long did you work in Hoover's for?

I started in 1954, and finished when I was fifty-nine.

That was 1989 then. So that's thirty-five years

Thirty-six I think. Thirty-five to thirty-six years, that's right.

Did you have a leaving present?

No. no. But after twenty-five years we had a gold watch, thirty pound to go out for the evening, and a taxi to take us and I think it was a hundred pound, as well for thirty-five years. We used to have badges worth Hoover on. Because the thing we had was our redundancy when we left there then from Hoover's.

So you were made redundant were you, when you were fifty-nine?

Well we had redundancy money when we finished. A lump sum from there.

But you retired though did you

Yes, at fifty nine then see.

And they provided you with a pension as well?

Yes. I get a monthly pension from them.

Looking back now, how did you feel about the years that you spent working there?

Oh wonderful. All my friends. We were all contented with our lives. We enjoyed ourselves and I think that is why, I didn't know and I don't think the girls knew what they wanted to do when they finished. My sister would have liked to continue doing the hats. She liked doing that. She liked meeting people and doing that. So that is why we were so contented with what we were doing then. It was different kind of work we done when we were there. Different jobs, as I told you. We had nice dances there and holidays. You were there more than you were home, you know what I mean. You spent more of our time in work than what you did at home, didn't you?

Would you have said, I know you had your sister there, your twin sister, but would you have said that the women there were like a family to you?

Oh I think so. Oh yes, yes. Mind you when it came time for us to retire, to be retired, we were ready then

But you kept in contact; you're still in contact then?

Well I'm only in contact with one of my friends there because one of them is dead and my sister. I was at the bus stop coming from the surgery and a man said, talking to me. He said, Hoover's? Yes?' So who ever we talk to I townit's a Hoover person! Because as I said before it was nice, a lovely place. I don't think I would have wanted to have done anything different. Because we could talk, laugh, enjoy ourselves. We weren't restricted anywhere

So they were good employers then?

Oh yes. Wonderful, wonderful. When we were going on holiday, it was abroad we were going anyway and we had to go on a Thursday, which was a working day and fair play

they did give us time off. My sister, I thought she might have a problem with her boss but he was more than willing. So instead of finishing on a Friday, we finished on a Thursday. Fair play it was from home to home.

65:59

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD