

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

**Switchgear, Pontllanffraith; Sales Rep for Eriez magnetics, Wilmslow; WCB
Containers, Stalybridge**

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Archive of Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru

I came from a mining background, like most of the people in this area. My father was one of five children. My grandfather was injured in the First World War. I don't really remember him working, but all I can remember is seeing a truncheon by the door. Later on in life I asked why and I found out because he was injured in the War, they gave him a job in the ROAF factory as a security man. So the truncheon was part of his job. My gran was a housewife. My father left school quite young because my grandfather had to retire through the injuries, eventually that he sustained in the First World War. He became a butcher, eventually. He loved his sport but he had to work on a Saturday so he decided that he would get out of working in a butcher's shop, because he had to work on a Saturday and couldn't enjoy his football. He then went to work for Powell Dyffryn as a driver, driving coal lorries all over Wales delivering high quality coal from wherever in this area, to Carmarthen, Hereford, all over the place he used to take it. Mind of information about places I've never heard of. Eventually he left becoming a driver and he became a collier and worked on the coalface, pick and shovel. That's where he stayed for quite a few years until just around the time I was born and he went back to school. He took his papers to become an official, so eventually he became an official in the colliery. It's like a white collar manager. A managerial job, white collar type job on the surface. He was actually underground, in charge of I don't know how many men. That's where my father worked. A highly respected man in the village.

My mother, she was a member of a large family. She was the eldest girl. She looked after all the siblings below her. My Gran and my Grandfather parted. They got divorced. When I was young I didn't know the heck. I had three

grandfathers and one grandmother! I couldn't fathom this out because I had two grandfathers on my mother's side. I didn't realise of course that my gran had got divorced and when I used to go over there I used to meet her second husband.

My mother eventually went into service, in Bristol. Hated it and managed to get a job back in Oakdale, in the village where she was from, in the colliery where my father worked. She worked in the canteen. My father used to come up the colliery, up the pit and eventually he started chatting up this young girl in the canteen and eventually they got married. Then along came me. I think they were married about a year it was and I came along. My mother, she never went back to work. She was a house mechanic, a house wife. The most important woman in the world, in my opinion.

Then along came my sister Janice and then along came my other sister Verna. As a family we lived, initially we lived in the Penllan. My father had to walk about a mile every morning and every night, which is not that far really, we understand that, to catch the bus. The week we moved up to Oakdale itself, to the village where my father worked, they put a bus on into the village! So for many years he walked a mile every day, back and fore, not far. But the year, it's sod's law they put a bus on into the Penllan. So we moved into a new council house up in Oakdale village, which is a very interesting village. It's not a garden village but it's custom built and we moved into number one, the first house in the new development in Oakdale. Number one Groes side Road and lived there, happily for all our lives 'til my father eventually passed away when he was eighty-six, about three or four years ago. Unfortunately my mother passed sway a few years before that. She had Alzheimer's and tragically Dad had to put her into a home and she was looked after very well. We looked after her as well.

Up in Oakdale then I attended Oakdale Secondary Modern School. Oakdale Juniors when I first moved there, just up the road, then transferred into Oakdale Secondary Modern School. I tried the eleven plus, failed. Interested in all things except academic things, but fortunately in this area there was Pontllanfraith Technical School. The boys had two bites of the cherry, unfortunately the girls didn't. So if you failed the eleven plus that was it for the girls, but the boys at twelve could try for the tech school. Somehow I passed for the tech and that year the grammar school and the technical school amalgamated. It became Pontllanfraith Grammar Technical School. So I ended up going to Pontllanfraith Technical School and thoroughly enjoyed it; good teachers, good mates and it was separate from the grammar school because they didn't have enough facilities to amalgamate. They amalgamated them in name only at the time and kept them running as two sites. Where I was a hundred per cent boys, but for Christmas functions we were allowed to join in with the grammar school. We integrated with the girls for just that type of function. The football teams, the rugby teams and the cricket, they all amalgamated. The boys from the grammar school and the boys from the tech formed one team, Pontllanfraith Grammar Technical sports side of it.

I had pretty happy schooling there. Academically I wasn't brilliant but was lazy, enjoyed life. Enjoyed sport more than anything else. Became cricket captain, rugby captain and everything like that. Eventually 'O' levels come and I tried the

9.17 'O' levels and passed four somehow. Then I did want to go into the police force. I tried to become an apprentice constable, whatever they called them in those days, but they weren't taking any on so the I thought I would try for some apprenticeships and fortunately in those days there were many apprenticeships you could try for. The Electricity Board, the Gas Board, British Steel Corporation, the telephone companies, South Wales Switch Gear, Alcan. They were all taking on apprentices. But like everything else you had to go and take an exam. Well the NCB, by father said, 'You're not going down the colliery. No way!' Nothing against it. 'It was a good livelihood, it gave him a good life, but he didn't want his son to go down the colliery. In some ways the last resort but that's not to say the colliers, he thought bad of it. He said it was an excellent living. I fortunately passed to get into South Wales Switch Gear

What did you have to pass to get it?

You actually had a formal written exam.

What was this to do, an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship, but at the time, it's like anything else in life you weren't given much information about it. Basically I wanted to become an apprentice, which is slightly better than, I'm not saying sweeping the road because they do an important job, but you had something technical rather than just doing a menial repetitive job. An apprentice, but what? An apprentice electrician, an apprentice mechanical engineer, what? I didn't know. I didn't have a clue. You weren't really given that information. I just wanted an apprenticeship. So you sat the exam and there must have been three of four hundred people taking it, at different stages. The day I went there was a huge room full of

How many places did they have?

I'll get to that one. How many places? The year I started, and this is unbelievable and I've got a photograph of it, one hundred apprentices. I don't know if there is any other company in South Wales that would take on a hundred apprentices in one hit.

That was a lot, even in those days, was it?

Yes. It is quite strange, my brother-in-law, his father worked in Alcan, I couldn't even get a form to try to get an apprenticeship in Alcan. I went to the grammar technical school, my brother-in-law went to a secondary modern school and had no qualifications whatsoever and he got an apprenticeship. It is the old thing, sometimes it is not what you know but who you know. Anyway he got a job in Alcan and I couldn't, but Chris is good, really good, a mechanical engineer type of thing. There was that type of thing in those days and it still happens today that doors open or close from the people your know. I could be taken to task, but if certain companies took five apprentices, or ten apprentices on. I think Alcan took along twenty-five apprentices that you, but the Switchgear were a hundred apprentices, a lot of people.

To do what then?

I went in as a mechanical engineer apprentice. Basically on the tools, with fitting, on that aspect. You could have an electrical apprenticeship, which meant that you

went as a wireman or Learnt all about the electrical side of it. But the South Wales Switchgear had a fantastical, that year they set up a brand new training school. They always had a training school but they never had as many apprentices as this year, so they set up a completely new system. It was like going to school, back to school. For the first year you didn't go on the shop floor other than to walk around and see someone, or have a chat with someone. You did nothing on the shop floor. You stayed one hundred per cent in a classroom or in a fitting shop, which was custom built, separate from the main factory. We played football and rugby. It was like school. We had a set, right Thursday afternoon its football. We used to go swimming. Basically for the first year it was an extension of school and you got paid. The fantastic wage of two pounds fifteen and a penny

What year was this then?

1964.

And you were?

Sixteen, seventeen. I might have to check on those figures. Going back to the NCB. Gary Hall who was my next door neighbour in Oakdale. He went in the colliery, which my father wouldn't let me go to and his first wage packet was ten pounds a week. Mine was two pounds fifteen and a penny. My father said, 'I've kept you all these years and I'll keep you a bit longer.' Two ponds fifteen and a penny was something that I had, which I never had. He preferred me not to go, as I say, nothing against collieries. There's coal in my veins, but my father said I don't want you to go down the colliery and I took his advice. I could have gone there and been seven pounds fifty better off a week. But it wasn't the money because you could get an apprenticeship which gave you the same training as in South Wales Switchgear but basically you were underground a lot, but there were top surface jobs.

Can I ask you, turn it a bit towards the women here. Were there any women apprentices, apprenticeships?

Yes

Right. And what did they do?

I've got a photograph of her. She was one of the first women apprentices taken on by South Wales Switchgear.

What did she train as?

She ended up in the drawing office, but she did everything that we did. She went on the shop floor afterwards. I've forgotten her name. She didn't start at the same time as us. She was before us. Sir Alfred Nicholas was a very shrewd man. He owned South Wales Switchgear, the Managing Director. And he got his knighthood for taking on apprentices. Whether he did this to become a knight, no one knows only he knows this. I've got my suspicions that he thought this was a good way of getting recognition. Give him his due. Lots of people; say it was cheap labour because a lot of these boys, we were on two pounds fifteen and a penny, went up to about three pounds odd. We were on the shop floor helping our fitters so basically we were cheap labour, in some ways but we were learning something. Yes this girl was there and she went through the whole thing. I've got a photograph of her in her apprentice green overalls, with a hat, which she had to

wear because of her long hair. Eventually she did everything that everyone else did. She went on the shop floor, she did this, she did that. Fitting, she was with a fitter, eventually she ended up in the drawing office and she became a woman draughtsman. A draughtswoman. Yes they did take a woman apprentice

18.31 **Out of the hundred apprentices that were taken on, how many of them were women?**

None. Not in my intake. Not one.

So it was an unusual

Oh Yes, it was unusual. There might have been one other lady, I can't remember because she ended up in the drawing office and I can't remember what her history. I know the one's history because it is on a photograph and I think it was put in the newspapers at some time or other around that period. One of the first women to be taken on as an engineering apprentice. I'm not sexist. I think women can, are brilliant. In my job, subsequently, women are better than men, in lots of the work that I have been involved in.

So I went through the Switchgear apprenticeship; one year in the training school, I went then one year on the shop floor. Then they took you from the shop floor up into an office. So one day I was in my green overalls as an apprentice, then the training officer says, 'Tomorrow you start in the production office.' So I went up there and I worked in an office for a year. The after a year they say, 'Right, you've got to go back on the shop floor.' So you were put into different departments. Quite a good training regime really, but like everything else in life some people fell lucky and they went in. The training officer says, 'I want Moses to go somewhere.' He's say to someone else, 'You've got to go there.' You might have hated that particular job. But it is like everything else in life, you had to do what you were told. The one day, I no intentions of become a draughtsman. I was on the shop floor and I was called down to the training officer's office, not being called down there because you were in trouble, because you knew that every now and then you were assessed. He said, 'Next week I want you to come to work in a collar and tie, coat, trousers. You're going in the drawing office. So I went up into the drawing office and became a mechanical draughtsman. I stayed in that drawing office a year, eighteen months, something like that. I finished my time as an apprentice in that drawing office.

During that period, I was always sporty and I damaged my leg playing rugby, very badly. So I ended up having an operation. I was off work for three months. In those days, no daily television, just the radio to keep you company with my mother. I was bored stiff, so I went to the doctor and said I want to go back to work and he said, 'No. You're not fit enough yet.' I said, 'I'm fed up. I want to go back to work.' He said, 'If you go back to work I'm not taking any responsibility for any problems that you have. What do you do?' I said, 'A draughtsman.' 'Can you sit down?' I said, 'Yes I can sit down quite a lot.' 'Have you got to go up steps?' I said, 'One set. One in the morning and one in the night.' Anyway I went back to work on a Thursday. Now who in their right mind would start mid-week? Normally you'd start on a Monday. The telephone went on my boss's desk and I was his unofficial goffer, so I picked the phone up because he wasn't there. 'Is Bill Moses there?' 'Yes, speaking.' 'This is Norman Care's

secretary. They would like you to come up and talk to them in the top office.’ Now Norman Care was the Chief Executive of the company. ‘I went, what the hell does he want me for?’ Anyway I went up there and it was like going into God’s country because you had to up these steps. I’d never been there in my life. It was a place that most people never went to.

To cut a long story short, I was interviewed to become a sales rep for the company, for a new division they were setting up for an American company. They were going into making magnets, electro magnets with a company called Eriez Magnetics. I didn’t even know where Eriez’s was. I knew about a magnet. They said, ‘The job is yours if you want.’ This was about after half an hour’s interview. ‘The job is yours if you want and we’d like a decision today.’ Now bearing in mind I’d just got married and Val was working in a firm Crompton Southern Rev in Newport and they wanted a decision virtually there and then. I said, ‘I’ve got to talk this over with my wife because they wanted me to move to the North West or the North East, either one. Sheffield or Manchester area, either side of the Pennines, because they had an office in both places. I went down to the office and phoned Val in Crompton’s and Webb. Now Val was a sewing machinist in Cromptons and Webb. She didn’t work in an office. They did not allow people to have private phone calls. I said to whoever I had to talk to in Cromptons and Webb, ‘This is very important. I need to speak to my wife, but please when you approach her don’t say someone has died. Just that your husband wants to talk to you on the phone.’ Basically I had a five minute phone call and she said, ‘Do what you think right.’ We ended up moving to Manchester. Wilmslow they had an office. I had to go to London first of all for a year. We’d just got married and every Sunday night I used to travel up on the train and every Friday night come back to South Wales. Val continued working because I did this for about a year, whilst I did some sort of training. They sent me to America as well, to the company they were setting up this business with in America. We eventually moved up to Manchester, an office in Wilmslow and we had a flat in a place called Macclesfield. Then eventually we bought a house. I covered the whole country, absolutely, from Land’s End to John O’Groats. The only other rep they had was the Sales manager who was an alcoholic and he always ended up in a pub.

26.16

Let’s bring it back to Wales then. Before we leave Switchgear though, I just wanted to ask you a few questions about the women in Switchgear. Tell me about Switchgear. How many of you worked there?

Switchgear were a massive company. I think at one time they employed about three and a half thousand people.

Where exactly was it?

They had a factory in Pontllanfraith. A factory in Caerphilly. Factory in Aberbargoed. Factory in Treforest and I’ve got a photograph of where all the women were working, in one section. In Pontllanfraith they had numerous women working throughout the factory in office jobs, but they also had one designated part of the factory where there were more women than men working and they made electrical insulators. I think I’ve got a photograph of that again because there were more women working there than anywhere else in the factory. I mean

you had your typists, but these were shop floor workers.

You say three and a half thousand, are you talking about the factory in Pontllanfraith.

There were fifteen hundred working there, a very large employer.

And how many of those were women?

There must have been about a hundred and fifty, two hundred throughout there. You had everything from the canteen, to the ladies on the shop floor, to the wages department. I knew lots of them.

So these women on the shop floor. What did they do?

If you have some wire, so that someone doesn't get a shock of it you put a shrouding around it. So if you had an electric cable there's a shrouding around it. In Switchgear, it wasn't the cable, it was something as big as your wrist, or slightly smaller. They used to have to encapsulate this with a material called araldite, which protected you from shocks. They had this section that encapsulated or covered heavy copper bars that were installed into electrical components for controlling high tension electricity. That was one of their major jobs. You did have some where they cut wires and form them into harnesses and they would be making things of that nature. If you are talking about more hands on things on the shop floor that's the area that they had. Of course you had everything else throughout the factories.

Why do you think the women were working on those things?

I really never thought about it because it could have been a man. They didn't pay them as much. I think it was as simple as that actually, thinking about it now.

Do you know how much the earned?

No, I wouldn't know. They earned less than the men. If there were two people in a department, and they were doing exactly the same job, the man would get more than the woman. Other than how much difference I wouldn't have any idea about it. At that age you never even thought about it. Perhaps if you were a woman you might think about it, but I don't think women were as liberated in those days. They never moaned about the fact that they weren't being paid as much as the next person. They weren't on piece rates, as far as I know, but that's perhaps being blunt about it.

Did they earn more than the apprentices?

Oh yes, the women did earn more than the apprentices. As an apprentice I used to play for the seconds football team and I used to get a pound for playing...untaxed

...

To ask you a little bit more about the women. Did you ever mix with the women?

Yes I think I did mention it, I did mix with the women.

When you were in the factory?

Yes, yes. The araldite section as it was called, where the women worked was run by a Mr Llaw Jenkins and even though I didn't actually work in that department I used to go into that department. I mentioned the football thing, because you were

playing football in that team you could go anywhere in that factory. It was like having a clipboard. You could go somewhere, talked to someone because they were interested in the football (the women) were at quite a far flung part of the factory. It wasn't that they were isolated, it was just that they built this new complex and the women were in there because that's where they set up the new part of the factory. Brand new technology in those days, so they built it there and they built it at a far part of the factory because that was the only place they could build it. It wasn't as if they wanted to keep the men from the women or anything like that. Nothing like that at all. But if you wanted to go there, there had to be a reason to go there, because it wasn't walking through. It wasn't on a normal route. It was so far flung from everywhere else that I used to go there and see the ladies and the girls on the wire on the shop floor. It wasn't the fact that they were women, they were workers, they were colleagues. There was no, they are women you mustn't talk to them, they were colleagues. You didn't look at it in any other light other than that. Of course I was attracted to some of them! What young blooded young lad wouldn't be attracted.

35.06 **These women, were they the same age as you?**

Some of them were, some of them were more mature. On the one part of the section, her name was Sheila. She was a lovely woman. She was ten years older than me, but at that time Buddy Holly had a song called, 'Sweet Little Sheila, you only have to see her, blue eyes and a pony tail.' I used to sing that one. Was it Buddy Holly? I used to sing that to her. She used to smile and what have you. I got on great with Sheila. She got in the family way and became very plump, in the maternal fashion and she never came back to work. Like a lot of ladies in those days they would work until they had a family then disappear.

But up in the drawing office we had tracers. There was a section, all women. There might be six or eight. They were not draughts people but they would take the drawings that the draughtsmen did and they would put big tracing paper over these drawings and ink them in where it was in pencil where the draughtsmen did it, they would go over it in ink, then they would photo them. These were what we called hard copies today. So there were six women there in amongst, I've got a photograph of the women, the drawing office. They did a non-technical job. They were called tracers, there were six of them there. Now the typing pool there was a huge typing pool in Switchgear. The amount of people they had there, they had lots of typist, copy typist, all sorts of typists. On the shop floor, other than that one section where it was a designated area, there was a paint shop where they half a dozen ladies and they were wonderful. I got on great with them. They just did a job like any of the men. They were de-greasing, is the word. If you had metal products and they've been worked on, very often then they had dirt on them or grease or oil and in the paint shop they had these half a dozen ladies, and they worked in the most atrocious conditions, in some ways, because ...they had these huge vats and they used to wash them in tetrachloride and it stunk. Today I think it is banned because it made you light headed. These women worked there five days a week, alongside the men. Other than the fact that they had hair, long hair to differentiate them you couldn't tell them from the men because of the overalls. They worked their socks off in that department.

And they were paid less

And they were paid less, of course, I'm sure because equal wages, I know they fought for it and eventually got it but it's not that long ago really. Definitely they weren't paid as much as the men.

1970

In 1970, but I think some of them got paid even then. Some unscrupulous people didn't pay the ladies that.

What was the relationship like between the men and the women in Switchgear? Was there any harassment either way?

I don't think so. I wasn't naïve as a young lad in any way shape or form. There must have been. In fact I think it was the other way. I think the women played merry hell with the men.

That's what I was asking, either way. You were a young lad, what was it like walking into a room full of women?

I used to sometimes feel a bit nervous.

How did they treat you?

40.53 I got on very well with most of the women there, not in the sexual way or anything like that. I think they were wonderful women, they just got their heads down. If you worked in that department, fifty-two weeks of the year, like everything else in life.

Did they used to tease you?

Oh yes I got teased rotten, teased rotten. Nothing untoward. 'You've got a nice bum.' Or something like that.

They used to say things like that?

Oh good god yes that's water of a duck's back, that type of thing

What sort of things did they used to say?

'What are you doing tonight?' 'Did you have a nice time with your girlfriend?' 'Do you want to take me to the pictures?' I'm not saying they did it to me or whether it was half a dozen boys that went in there, or other men. I just don't know. I didn't fancy myself in that way. I was confident, but a lot of women can make you very nervous!

Were these older women teasing you or were they women the same age as you?

I think the older ones were worse than the younger ones, but isn't that life?

Did you enjoy it?

Oh yes, thoroughly enjoyed it.

Even though you felt nervous?

After about five minutes the nerves went out of the window. What man wouldn't enjoy a couple of women giving you bit of banter? It was not crude. It was light hearted. I would accept that and I would always draw the line. Work ethics is, I can swear like anyone else. I can swear better than anyone else, but when ladies

are around my etiquette is very good. Some of the women's etiquette wasn't so good mind!

42.59 **What was their language like?**

Industrial language could come out. It was quite funny. You could possibly know someone who you saw walking up the High Street, in Blackwood, with their husband and they smile and say, 'Hello Bill.' IN work they could be quite crude and rough with you. But you didn't think any different of that person. It was just work and out of work. Whereas today, some young girls, just walking up the street is worse than anything I heard in some factories. But that brings us back to the way they've been brought up, I think. I've been brought up 'proper'. Some of those ladies would make my hair, I did have hair, good hair in those days, it would curl. It wasn't vindictive, nothing like that. It's when if some said, 'Go away!' and they meant it and put all the language in with it. That's different than having a bit of a banter and bit of language comes in. That's slightly different. But of course, and I've always said this, women can use it to their own advantage.

How old were you when you became a sales person?

I was twenty-two, twenty-three.

And eventually did you come back to Wales?

I came back to Wales to sell.

Where did you sell in Wales? Name some of the factories for me.

I worked for a company called Whitechapel and Beany which was called WCB Containers which was one of the biggest suppliers of material handling in Britain. If I tell you they made everything from a *Sunblest* bread tray to a Walls' sausage tray. That is a bakery handling, mixing vessels. That was just a small part of it. Basically there wasn't a factory in South Wales, or Wales. My area was up to Aberystwyth, across to Newtown, down to Hereford, came down to Chepstow and from Chepstow to St David's. That was my area in South Wales. There wasn't basically a factory I couldn't go into that wasn't able to use the packaging equipment that I was selling. I went from everyone, food manufacturers, to textiles to electrical – the Sonys of this world; electrical assembly companies, bakeries, meat processing factories. You name it I went to it and nearly every one of them had a woman working in there or a lot of women working in there.

Alexon in Pontypridd, garment manufacturer, ninety-five per cent women. Burton's Biscuits Cwmbran, quite a high percentage of ladies working there, on the packaging lines, putting the Wagon Wheels in and everything. The it became quite automated so some of the women disappeared.

What was it called when you worked, was it called Burton's?

It was called Weston's originally. Weston's Biscuit Factory and then became Burton's. Then there was Lovell's in Newport who made cakes and everything. They made the cake for our wedding. Val was working in Newport and she knew one of the girls in Cromptonson and Webb, who was another company I used to go to. They knew somebody in Lovell's and they said, We'll get your wedding cake done at a reasonable cost, so we had a wedding cake there. Lovell's was also made sweets. Triang Pedigree in Merthyr. They made toys, prams. Berlie Bra

Company up in, textiles. We all know what an uplifting job they made. There was Cora's in Aberbargoed. Val's sister worked there as a supervisor and they made for Marks and Spencers, two hundred and fifty women, three hundred woman? Maurice Cohen made for Marks and Spencers, about a hundred and fifty, two hundred women in Pengam. Avana Bakeries, Cardiff, Avana Bakeries, Rogerstone. Hundreds of women, all on the production line. I've been abused by many of them! There was Merrett's the bakers, in Cardiff. They've changed it now, it's become Memory Lane, or something eventually. I'm not absolutely certain on that. They were creaming cakes so there were lots of women. Gossards in Pontllanfraith, where my sister worked. They made foundation garments. Hundreds of women in there too, no a hundred and fifty in there perhaps in that one. British Telecom, Abercarn. Masses of women worked there, some of them there thirty or forty years.

What did they make there?

They made telephones. British Telecom made their own telephones in those days. You couldn't buy a telephone other than through British Telecom. If you wanted a telephone you had to have a British Telecom phone. That was the only phone, eventually it was a free market and you can get any telephone, shape, size, colour, whatever. In the old days you had a few choices and it was the old telephone that we were traditionally brought up with. Because they opened the markets. They made the Trimphone. Do you remember the Trimphone? They went from the old hand set to the Trimphone with the brrr, brr. Eventually they opened the market up and their share. If you had a telephone in your house you had to have a British Telecom phone. Eventually they said you can have anything you want, so they started refurbishing instead of shutting down they started refurbish telephones for their own systems. That was a very big employer down there and they must have had two hundred, three hundred women in there or more. We've talked of Standard Telephone and Cables in Treforest.

How many people worked there?

I think there were two factories, so there might have been three hundred or more in there. When you think about it, where did all these women's jobs disappear to now? Hill's Industries in Caerphilly. They made rotary lines. There were sixty, seventy women in there. Strad's in Caerphilly. Strad's made men's suits, so it was a sewing factory again. I'm not actually certain how many worked in there because I only ever used to go in the warehouse and I was never on the shop floor.

The job that I had, inside my briefcase, I had a little note for myself embellished there. It said, 'Walk the system.' If you can go inside a factory and see what they're doing you can sell more to that factory than if you just sat in an office just talking to someone and saying, 'I can do this, I can do that.' Some firms would take you around; you couldn't go on your own. You could go around, so you had an idea of how many worked there. If it was another company you wouldn't go past reception. That was it. The only way you might know was looking at the size of the factory and have a guess.

52.59 **Why do you think that was?**

It was just company policy with some of them. No reason other than that. Johnson and Johnson which is a comparatively new company. You couldn't go in

the factory unless you had twenty-four hour clearance. Health and Safety in those days because they were. Walls' that wasn't even in Wales so I won't even mention that one. There was Stadium across the road from Strad's in Caerphilly, they made crash helmets and they had all these women in there, assembling crash helmets for motor cyclists, for the army, tanks. The men who were in the tanks, their helmets were made by Stadium in Caerphilly. There was Aero Zip, good god that was a huge site but a lot it was automated so I couldn't say if I went into a room there were fifty women. It was so big there could have been two hundred and you didn't know where they were because, or if they even had twenty. The machines were so automated that the. It was a huge place but I don't think they employed that many ladies, but they could have. There was the Rizla cigarette factory in Treforest. I'm only covering the area that you mentioned that you were interested in, rather than West Wales. I used to go down to St David's, as I said, but these are only the ones in this particular area. Lotary's where Val worked on. I tried to get her, but she's adamant. It's amazing she'll sit and talk to you, but there we are. They changed their name to Crompton Southern Webb. They made RAF uniforms, police uniforms, fire brigade. I think there were two hundred and fifty workers there. Val used to have to get up at half past five in the morning to catch a bus to Newport to work and come home. I know it's only sixteen miles but it is quite a distance in the sixties, in some ways.

Up in Brynmawr there was the Britton Shoe Company and you've heard of Tuf Boots, well they made the Tuf Boots or they were part of that group. They had different factories and different factories made different products. I've got a feeling that they made some of the Tuf Boots up there. They employed lots of sewing machinists. A lot of these are sewing orientated or textiles. What has happened in this country? The textile industry, in comparison is zero. Marks and Spencer's takes their work away. I'm not criticising Marks and Spencer's, actually they were one of the longest to hold out. They kept their business in Britain longer than British Home Stores or Littlewood's. They had to go with them or sink because they were getting their products made cheaper in the Far East. It intrigues me, where have all these ladies gone?

You showed us an illustration about Hoover. You think about it, making washing machines there wouldn't be much potential for ladies working in a factory like Hoover, but yes you have a photograph to prove, as I said to you, the box on their line is one of my boxes, that I sold to them. Or I sold then a replacement because depending on when that photograph was taken. It could have been someone prior to me. That's one of my products there as well.

Up and down the valleys from here to Cardiff, West to Chepstow and up to Abergavenny. Well one of the biggest, Opie Chocolates. I don't know if you've talked to anyone in Opie's.

Yes I have.

Hundreds of ladies. Fantastic women. I got on like a house on fire. It was my second home. It's a wonder I didn't blow up like a balloon because I had so much chocolate from Opie Chocolates. A really nice cross section of people. Now Merthyr has had a drubbing over the years about people saying how rough the Gurnos and all that. Most of the women were from that neck of the woods, you

know. They were wonderful, wonderful people there at Opie's Chocolates and Gossard's. Gossard's is the one place that I have gone bright red because they played me like a hen. I had to spend. I had to go on the shop floor to measure up for some stuff. By damn! I was in my thirties and I thought I knew stuff but they really, not shocked me, but they didn't frighten me, they nearly frightened me.

So what did they do?

Anything and everything verbally, you were fair game. It was nothing I hadn't heard before, but it was constant. You would think they were sex starved or something because it was all sexual. That was the place as well that I went into this room and the manager was there with me, type of thing. In walks this girl and she says, 'What do you think of this fit?' She walks in with a new bra on and knocks on the door. It was a new style and they wanted his comments on it. There's me, a man of the world. From the waist up, just a bra and he's going up twanging it, but not in the wasname. 'Yes that stitching is alright.' That's unnerving in some ways. That one curled my hair. I came home and told Val about that. I could fight back, if I was measuring something, stretching up. 'I'll have your trousers down!' 'I'm waiting!' You just have to come up with a straight back.

Were you ever physically molested?

59.58 No, no no.

Or was it all verbal stuff?

All verbal. I've had me bum pinched. I've had me bum pinched. I can't remember where it was but I didn't take any notice of it in any way shape or form.

How did it make you feel?

It's like everything.

Was it like it all the time?

1.01. No, no, no. It's like you get a situation like at Christmas. I've been to functions where I've had nothing to do with the gang, other people. It's a shared function. You have a work's outing, a work's day out, a Christmas function and you get a gang of women who wouldn't say, 'Be, ba, boo!' to anyone. They get a couple of drinks inside them and they're totally different. I think in some ways, in the work environment, not in every factory, you wouldn't expect it. As a man there was nothing I could do about it, anyway, if I was that way inclined. It wasn't that bad.

Were you ever really upset by it?

No,no, no.

Do you think the majority of women were like that, or just a small minority?

It was like a small minority really. You could have a situation, like it was totally false. It's like in *Coronation Street*, you've got a factory there, a sewing factory. Rita Fairclough, her husband Dennis, worked for WCB Containers, for the company I worked for. They were man and wife when she started off in *Coronation Street*. When *Coronation Street* first came on, in all the factories, all the boxes in the sewing factories were supplied by WCB Containers and they tactfully had WCB logos on there. If you watch *Coronation Street*, the banter on

there is not crude and I think, you know, if it is acceptable at seven thirty on television. I know it is a television thing. It was no worse than anything like that. Nothing.

But the language was worse wasn't it?

The language was. As you were passing through you only picked up some 'f' words they were saying about last night. But that was the work environment and I don't think it was vindictive or malicious in any way shape or form. Not working. For example, I went to a company and their attitude was brilliant when I used to be there. They offered me a job. I've been offered lots of jobs many times in the companies I called on. I eventually did go to this company, but when I went there to work fulltime, to when I used to call on them weekly or every two weeks was totally different to when I worked there fulltime. I think I was passing through some of these factories. In Opie Chocolates, I used to go to Opie Chocolates every Wednesday. Every Wednesday, fifty-two weeks of the year, other than holidays. I was part of their furniture. I had a white overall from Opie Chocolates rather than having to find a white overall. Basically I could walk anywhere in that factory and the girls were brilliant.

If you were a familiar figure did that make you more of a target or less of a target? You said that one factory changed when you

You might be right there. As a visitor. I've been a total stranger walking through. There's one incident. I know it's not in your area, but it was in St David's in Slimma Slacks. They crucified me and I'd never been there before in my life. Very nicely crucified me. I think the manager said, 'Mr Moses is coming up to measure for some new equipment and I'm leaving him to it.' That was it. He left and I was left to sort everything out. I didn't need him to hold my hand. All they knew was that I was a supplier, but I could have been a senior director of the company. By damn the give me some stick!

What did they do?

All the verbals. 'We'll have your trousers down, Ethel, you want to watch her. She'll have you tomorrow behind the bike shed. Nothing really bad.

Why do you think women behave like that?

Bravado. You could come up with, perhaps they were prudes in the house and they just changed in work. I just don't know. I've been to Christmas functions and someone you know wouldn't say, 'Bee, baa boo' to someone but have one drink and they are different.

There is alcohol involved and it is not in work.

There is alcohol and it is not in work, I quite agree. I wouldn't say that all women be like that, throughout my working history, but men are. I just think they just acted the same as men in some ways. I've never been there when they are talking about their sexual relations with their husbands, but I've been with men when they said, 'Me and my .. ooh.' Whether that's bravado or what. Val is the one who should be talking to you. What she used to tell me what happened around the canteen table was shocking. The sexual harassment from fathers and uncles and what have you, which is totally different to the work environment, that's how the girls used to talk. Nothing was sacred. They would talk about anything.

1.07.35 **Do you think that in a different age where things were much worse for women, do you think that in some ways it was payback time?**

They were in some ways put upon. Women would appear to have much less freedom in those days than today. The word was to be seen and not heard. When they were in the work environment they could be heard.

Do you think in some ways, you are implying that in some ways harassment was going on every day of their life and in some ways it was payback time?

Yes put the men down I some ways it could be. That's a generalisation but in principal I could go up to these factories. They would just get their heads down and they would look up and just get on with the work. It was only on occasions you had the banter.

How often did you mix with women from different factories at a social level?

I used to go to lots of Opie Chocolates social events. I was invited. I could go with Val, normally accompanied. I've never been to a function other than with Val, to any works dos.

You'd be invited by the different factories?

Yes, yes. I've been invited. I'd get on very well. I know it's not here but there was a massive company called War and Goldstone in Manchester, Salford. They had a factory in St Helens, I think it was. The factory manager said to me, 'See that door there?' 'Yes'. 'It's locked. I do not step outside that door, at this time of the year. It's Christmas. There's no drink in the factory, but they're wild!' And he's the manager. It's like Christmas is freedom time somehow. We've been to a couple of functions. I had a good relationship with lots of the companies I used to go to, so I'd meet some people outside work as well. I have met some of the ladies who were in uniform and then you see them outside. And you'd say, 'You've got legs!' Because they had trousers on. You'd see someone and I'm not being sexist, you put a standard uniform on five hundred women, white coats. They've got their hair in a hat or something and basically you don't realise that they've got hair down here. 'God I didn't know that was you.' You see someone in a very different light because in the bakeries they'd be covered head to toe really and you just saw the face.

You've talked about a couple of factories here. Do you think that a certain type of factory was worse than others?

Well there are some factories, they are just thee for earning money. There were women who what they wanted to do was if the start at eight o'clock . They would go in at seven thirty and go straight onto their machine because they were on bonus. They weren't interested in having a conversation with anyone they just go their heads down. The world could fall around them and they just got on with it. No I couldn't say a sewing factory, one sewing factory, some sewing factories were the same. They were all totally different, walking around and they would just give you a glance and get on with it

1.12.21

So the type of work they didn't really affect their behaviour? That was a good point as to whether they were on bonus or not so the money was more important than the banter.

Yes. She'd go in and have fifteen minutes break but it didn't mean that she had

fifteen minutes break because they wanted to get back to their machine because they were on piece work. They'd fight hammer and tongs. If I say it it's got to be said. There are different size boobs, correct? Val was making bras. She said to the one supervisor one day, 'Are we not making any small bras at the moment?' 'Yes we're making small bras, they are coming through as many as the big bras.' 'Well I seem to be having all big bras.' Val didn't know but the girl who was doing the same job as her, there was only the two of them doing this particular job. She was sorting out small and big. She was getting all the small. They were both on piece work. To make a big bra takes more time than a small bra. You had women doing that, to that degree. Val stopped behind after they went to break and she took all the small bras off this girl and put all the big bras on there and never said a word to her. It never happened again. Some of them were as craft as that to get. They were there to work. It's cheating in some ways. It isn't cheating in some ways because you are still doing the job but an easier job.

At Crompton, Son and Webb, where Vaal worked, they used to have work boxes. They had garments in parts. You'd pick up a work box and then you'd make the garment or you would make the part that you were doing. They'd have specialist machines to put a zip in. One girls would do all the zips and then she'd put it back in the box and it would go down to the next girl and she would put something else on it and it would go to the next. Sometimes they would call it make through when you make a garment from beginning to end or as Val was doing. She was doing one specific job, pass it to the next girl who would do something else. There was a couple of them doing it. They were on piece work. She said that one of the girls would get up and pick up three boxes and take all the work when she started working down there as a youngster. She wasn't strong enough, 'I had to sit there with no work.' Get it sorted! She stood up to this girl and it never happened again. So women can be quite bitchy in work and that's the piece work side of it. On some of those things, my experiences are only through second hand comments from my own wife. Other than that, walking through a factory on a regular basis. Opie's, Burton's Biscuits, Parke Davies Wall and Lambert. You walk through Parke Davies Wall and Lambert and the only way you could tell if it was a man or a woman was if she went into the Ladies and he went into the Gents. You saw that much of their face.

What did they make there?

Drugs.

Just their eyes?

Yes. If they could get them to pluck their eyebrows and eye lashes, they would have done that. So you couldn't even tell, if they didn't talk to you, if it was a man or a woman because an overall makes you all look the same.

Where was that factory?

Parke Davies – Pontypool. Unfortunately shut down. Lots of women in there. They made the birth pill, it was an old factory. The other one that had quite a few women in was Girlings, for an engineering works, assembling stuff.

How long did you do this work for, in Wales?

Twenty odd years. And the changes, alright I went from, as a rep, no I take it all

back. I was thinking of WCB Containers. I went to a firm called Reed Corrugated cases and that made the cardboard boxes. Everything you have comes in a cardboard box. So the same factories I was selling for WCB, I was going to Burton's Biscuits selling cardboard boxes; Opie Chocolates, cardboard boxes; Gossards, Cardboard boxes. So instead of stuff that was in the shop floor, for the manufacturing process, it was the finished item that was being put in there. I was still going there, that's why Reed Corrugated, one of the reasons I got the job was that I had contacts in all these other places. A very large company over here was Motill's. They became Baby Sterolyn and they made petrie dishes. They made all types of things like that for the medical industry and that was full of women. Keith, who was the manager, was a very good friend of mine and he said, 'I don't know what appends on the night shift!' The stories that he used to hear, he couldn't confirm happened. But if half the stories he was told happened, he didn't know what the night shift were doing.

What were the stories then?

Sex behind the pallets and all things like that. The ultimate things went on there/ But that's man and woman. C'est la vie. That's life! You can put all the things in to stop things but where there's a will there's a way, they say. We were walking through their shop floor, in the warehouse and there was a condom on the floor and he went wild, absolutely wild. I don't know what the end result of it was. It wasn't a finger stall because they used to use finger stalls for certain things. It was a condom. He went wild.

These things happen in life. After the War was there this sexual emancipation? It didn't happen for me in the sixties. I was around but it passed me over the top or something. I don't know why. Something happened. Free love? I'm perhaps naïve. I don't know. The innuendos and all the things that were said in the factories I just used to take. There was nothing vicious in any way shape or form as far as I was concerned. I wasn't naïve enough to think that. I don't think I was ever compromised enough to feel I was attacked by a woman. No.

You didn't ever feel physically threatened?

No, no. I wish I had been!

81:58

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD