

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Milford Haven Flax Factory

(Florence says she started work here when she was seventeen. This would have been in 1947, yet she talks of prisoners of war working there so the probability is that it was before 1947. She says she worked there for about four years.)

Interviewee: VSW036 Florence Jenkins

Date: 5.3.14

Interviewer: Susan Roberts on behalf of Women's Archive of Wales

Date of Birth: 21st September 1930

Florence was born in Hazelbeach, Neyland. Her father worked on the railway there. Her mother didn't go out to work. She had an older half-brother who worked down the Mining Depot. She attended an all-girls school in Neyland (the boys' school was behind it.)

She moved to a "Western" house, provided by her father's work, and lived there until she was twenty one years old, when she got married.

She was fourteen years old when she left school and went to work in a hotel (the Lion Hotel?) in Pembroke. She then worked in Rabaiottis. She would lay the tables, and serve when she worked in the hotel. She also "served" when she worked in Rabaiottis.

When she worked at the flax factory there were some German prisoners of war working there. When she went in to the factory one morning one of the POWs had hung himself.

Florence can't remember how she got her job in the flax factory. She was about seventeen years old when she went to work there. She enjoyed working there. She would start work at nine o'clock in the morning and finished about five o'clock. Florence didn't consider it hard work. She was in the flax factory for about four years.

The men who worked in the factory did the heavier type of jobs like getting the flax from the fields. Florence and the girls would then go out and tie in round and stand it up.

There were about four prisoners of war working with them there. They weren't really allowed to speak to them. Florence thinks there were about twenty people working in the flax factory.

When she started there the manager came round to show them what to do. Florence was glad of the work. When Florence had a day off when she was working at the hotel, she would have to be in by ten o'clock because they would shut the doors. (She was living in.) When she worked at the factory she lived at home.

No qualifications were required to work at the factory, just the ability to learn. They were paid a flat rate every week.

She also worked down the 'braiding room' on the docks making fishing nets, and they had to reach a target there. She couldn't stick it there long. Her sister in law worked there before her and she suffered with her chest, and thinks it was due to the twine used in making the nets.

She later worked in the laundry, and got married when she worked there. She worked on the sheet machine, folding sheets. Then they put her on the collar machines which would spin round. She was injured during this time as the equipment spin off and hit her in the face, knocking her top teeth out. They paid for her teeth, which cost £6, and that was it. She was only off work for about a week. She heard that the next day they had that machine taken away and replaced by a new one. She refused to go on the machine when she went back to work.

Out of all these jobs the one she enjoyed the most was the one in the laundry because it meant she had the company of the other girls. There were over twenty girls working in the laundry. There was the outside side where the dirty clothes coming in would be sorted. There was an elderly woman there washing socks.

Florence remembers there was fifteen when the Second World War finished and they had a big celebration. They all went down the promenade in Neyland, dancing.

Florence was fourteen when she started smoking. In those days they could buy five in a packet. She would have a cigarette during her break when she was at the factory. The machines were quite dangerous and they had to be very careful that they didn't lose any fingers. It was mainly single women who worked in the flax factory. She would give her mother money to pay for her keep. Even when she worked in the hotel in Pembroke she would give her mother most of the money, and she wasn't even living at home then. She didn't go out much, because there was nowhere much to go. There was a dance hall in Neyland, and a picture house. Florence's mother didn't like her going dancing, although her father didn't mind. She went to a dance in Pembroke Dock. Her father knew she was going but she didn't tell her mother. She came home in a rowing boat from Pembroke Dock to Neyland.

If Florence was off sick from the factory she wouldn't be paid.

Florence also worked as a potato picker after she got married. She remembers picking potatoes on a particularly hot day. They would put their scarves under a cold tap in the field, and put them round their necks. Mr Davies the farmer came along with lollipops for them, and said he thought these would cool them down. They replied that they wanted to finish not

have a lolly and carry on working. It was hard work and the next day they would be aching. They would be like a load of cattle getting into the back of the lorry.

The manageress was the person on the factory who looked after them, although Florence never complained about anything.

Florence tells the story of how she met her husband after being to the cinema in Milford. Him and his friend followed Florence and her friend, and he decided he was having the little one (Florence).

At the flax factory, she didn't wear a uniform. The work was quite dirty. There would be bits flying about when the material went through the machine. The POWs wore their prison clothes. Even though they weren't allowed to speak to them, they would sometimes say hello. It was too busy to chat with each other while they were doing their work. It was noisy in the machine part of the factory. The field wasn't very far from the factory building.

There was no heating in the factory, and it was well lit. There was no music played there. They would have a laugh during break time. Florence never went out with any of the men at the factory. The working week was five days, Monday to Friday and didn't work shifts. Florence took sandwiches for her lunch.

While she worked on the potatoes, sometimes they used to work 'by the bag', and the girls would watch how much the others had picked, and whether someone else had picked more because they had come over onto their line.

Florence thinks they had a week's holiday while she worked in the factory. Florence would walk to work, and this would take her an hour. It was alright going home but getting there was tiring because the walk was uphill. They didn't have anything organised for them at Christmas time.