

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Mettoys, Fforestfach, Swansea during the 1960s (and briefly in John Stanton's clothing factory, Swansea)

Interviewee: VSW051 Jean Veronica Evans

Date of birth: 1.1.1945

Date of interview: 8.4.14

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

Jean was born in Swansea. Jean can't remember where her parents were working. Jean was an only child. She went to school in Terrace Road and then Townhill. She left school when she was fourteen years old. She was glad to leave school. One week after leaving school she got a job working in a grocery shop. She can't remember how she got the job. She must have been fifteen years old. She didn't like the job. The store was called Home and Colonial in Swansea. The manager was very strict.

00.01.53: She said:

'I used to be on the front step at half past eight in the morning scrubbing it, and I thought, gosh, I don't like this.'

She had to be in by about eight o'clock and finished about six o'clock. She worked Monday to Saturday, although Thursday was a half day. There were quite a few people working there – the boys were down stairs working on the meats, etc, and then there were the people serving.

00.02.56: 'I did serve, but first of all I was a dogsbody, more or less, keeping things tidy and clean more or less'.

She stuck it there for seven or eight months and then got a job in Mettoys. She didn't like the boss in the store. He was rude to her because she was the last one in, and she was only fifteen years old.

She went up to Mettoys and had an interview and left the store not long after. Jean thinks the manager at the store was glad to see her go. She didn't know anybody working in Mettoys already. She went along there to try for a job on the off-chance.

She enjoyed working in Mettoys, even though it was hard work. In the beginning, she didn't think she would be able to stick it because it was very hard. It was harder than working in the shop, because she had to be in there for half past seven, and didn't finish until five o'clock. There was a ten minute break in the morning for a cup of tea, a half hour break for lunch and a ten minute break in the afternoon. Everything was weighed and she earned what was in the big pallets.

At Mettoys Jean worked on a big machine, with a big handle, and she had to put a little round thing into the machine, and then put the end product into the pallet. She did this for a number of days but she was moved around.

00.07.27: 'You was moved around a bit. You didn't stay on the same thing while you was there, from job to job.'

From there, she moved to the Assembly, where they were making the toys on the machines. That was a better job and she stayed until she got married. She was always on the day shift. She left after she got married and had her little boy, but came back after eight months and went onto the evening shift. Her husband or mother would look after her son in the evenings. She didn't really want to go back to work but felt that she had to. Her husband was training to be a welder at the time, and therefore wasn't earning much money. She was in the Fettling Department, where they cleaned all the bits on the car parts. She didn't like that particular job. She knew people working in the Assembly and told a supervisor there that she didn't like working in the Fettling Department. She asked if there were any vacancies for an inspector in the Assembly. As a result she got a job inspecting all the cars, ready for packing.

She inspected thousands of toy cars. The work could be boring but was better if she was on with somebody who she could have a bit of fun with it was quite enjoyable. She would tell the line manager if she spotted any sub-standard toys. Then she was given a job in charge of a few of the workers in that particular part of the factory. That was a bit more responsibility. She did feel under pressure because the white coats were quite strict. After a while she decided she'd had enough of the evening shift so she got a job in the 'Skirt Shop' on the Kingway in Swansea, selling clothes. Although it was an easier job than the one at Mettoys, it was very boring. She would be looking for something to do rather than be busy all the time. She was only there for eight months, and then went to the sewing factory (John Stanton's). She was only there for three weeks and then went back to Mettoys. She could have had a job in Corona but didn't want to take it, or could have had a job in Shopper Check but didn't want to take that because she wasn't any good 'at sums'.

00.13.22: 'You could finish on a Friday, and you could go for a job and you'd have it on the Monday.'

Somebody suggested that she could get a job at Mountpleasant as a domestic. So her mother got her a job at Mountpleasant, as she was working there. She was then there for thirteen years. She enjoyed working with old people but it took her a while to get used to the job because she found the work upsetting. She was crying on the ward one day and when the sister asked her why she said that she'd said hello to one of the old men and he'd started crying. The sister told her that she would have to get used to it if she was going to continue working there, that people who have had strokes do become very emotional.

She enjoyed working with a crowd of girls in Mettoys – as she did when she was on inspection but they had to be careful because if they passed anything that wasn't up to scratch they would be in trouble. It had to go through quite a few stages to find out where the problem had occurred.

00.15.43: 'There would be a rumble going round the factory. The boss is on his way round. Oh my God, we'd be all trembling. He used to stand on the end when I was passing all these toys, and I'd think, Oh my God, I hope they're all right, because he wouldn't tell you.'

His name was Mr Katz, a very tall man. He used to do spot checks. She knew if something wasn't right she'd be in trouble with whoever was in charge of the line.

She had fun in Mettoys and they played games such as 'guess the film star' from their initials.

One of the sisters on the ward in Moutpleasant where she worked told her that she would make a nice nurse because she had compassion. She tried to encourage Jean by saying that she could get her a job, and she could then start as an auxillary. Jean declined the offer because she didn't want to do the 'worst bits'. One night Jean offered to sit with one of the female patients who never had any visitors, who seemed agitated, and was in fact dying. Jean sat with her and she seemed calmer, and then she passed away quietly.

00.21.19: 'My mother was the type like, 'there's no idle hands', because I was out of school and in work.'

Compared to shop work the money in the factory was good. She used to get off the bus from work at Mettoys on a Friday night and go into town to spend her money. She would go straight to Littlewoods to buy a top or a skirt. She made quite a few friends in Mettoys. Most of the girls were from Fforestfach or Townhill. Mettoys was a big factory, so Jean had reservations when she first started there, and some of the supervisors were quite strict. She thought that she had to stick it and see what happened, rather than changing jobs all the time. She moved from job to job within the factory and said, 'you just did it'.

00.24.05, 'I knew that I had to work, so I worked.'

Some of the supervisors were nice, then there was the strict ones.

00.24.26: 'As long as you did your work, you kept out of trouble.'

The white coats were mostly men.

There were 'hundreds' working there. There were two factories there – one up the top and the other down the bottom. Jean never worked in the paint shop.

00.25.15: 'That estate was a booming estate'.

Jean did get fed up of the monotony of the working, for example sticking a thin little transfer onto a toy. This was time-consuming and 'fussy'.

There was a mixture of married and single girls there.

When Jean was working in Mountpleasant and had her daughter, she had six weeks off work.

Jean wore her own clothes to work at Mettoys, and the work wasn't particularly dirty. Jean gave her money keep when she first started there.

00.31.43: 'I didn't ask a lot of questions. I just did my work.. but the more I got into it the more I like it.... Sometimes she [the supervisor] would put me on a nice little job and I would be happy. Then perhaps I'd be on something else and I wouldn't be happy.'

Jean had to clock in and out and was always on time to work. There was a little café on the main road where she used to go at lunch time, and she had to clock out when she went there. Jean doesn't remember the job being dangerous, and didn't hear about other people having accidents.

Jean can't remember music being played there (unlike the sewing factory, where they played music.) This John Stanton's factory was at the bottom of the estate. She didn't like sewing, and doesn't know why she went there, but just fancied a change. The three weeks that she was there was a trial period, but she didn't like it at all. At the end of the three weeks they took her back at Mettoys, without a problem. This was in the Assembly and in packing. Jean would enjoy packing. It was a 'nice little job'.

The factory was warm in the summer and cold in the winter.

They would finish early on the last Friday before Christmas, and would finish at twelve on this day.

00.36.20: 'We used to take all our make-up and clothes and go for a drink.'

They used to go to a pub opposite Mettoys, or 'hop' into town. Jean can't remember any Christmas parties organised by Mettoys.

Jean didn't eat in the canteen, but took her own food to work.

Mettoys was quite a friendly place, if you got to know the people and did your work. She worked five days a week, Monday to Friday, with extra work available sometimes on a Saturday.

Jean was very quiet when she was young, but came out of her shell during the course of her factory work. She would sit on the line for her morning break.

00.42.31: 'We got on with it. We went to work and did the job ... and fell into bed.'

There would be a two week shut down every year. Jean would stay at home during her time off. Jean would get up at six in the morning, in order to get the bus for work. It was a service bus but there were many girls on it going to different factories.

Jean remembers the car from the film 'Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang' outside the factory. They made a model of the car in the factory, although Jean didn't work on this line. She did work on a James Bond car though. Jean talks about the toys cars being collectors' items now.

00.46.25: She said, 'You know when I see them on the TV I think, oh God, I done thousands of those, passed those down the line. I hope they're alright.'

She enjoyed working at the factory because of the fun that they had – **‘the people you met, the people you knew, and you got to know.’**

Jean doesn't remember any collections being made for workers who left, or who were having a baby.