

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Dolgarrog Aluminium (1960 - 1964)

Also Llanrswt Rubber Factory -? A branch of Greengate and Irwell, Llanberis

Interviewee: VN005 Mary MacDonald Davies

Date: 30: 12: 2013

Interviewer: Kate Sullivan on behalf of Women's Archive Wales

00:10 *Okay, Mary, could you tell me your full name and date of birth please?*

Mary Macdonald Davies. 9th of the 4th, '41.

Can you tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, your family, parents?

Well, my father, he came here from Dunkirk, he was evacuated here, so my mother met him here, and got married, like, and had me and my brother. My mother, of course, was Welsh, she was from Llanrswt.

So your father was from Scotland.

Scotland, my father, he was evacuated from Dunkirk, to the Vic, it's knocked down now, you know.

The Victoria Hotel?

You know the Court there, as you come into Llanrswt by the bridge, that used to be a lovely hotel that did. And they were evacuated there. So my mother met and he never went home, did he, he stayed.

So did she meet him in a club or a pub or just on the street?

On the bridge, ha., ha. Yes, on the bridge, and that was it, they never went home. But my nain kept the chip shop in, where the Chinese is now, in Station Road.

So how many children did they have? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I've only got one brother.

And where did you go to school?

In the modern school here. Up the back.

So what did your father do after the war?

He was just like, jobbing it. He used to do a bit of upholstery, and then he opened a shop here, fishing tackle and dog food, and what have you. And then he closed it about 1966, something like that.

So how long did he have the shop?

He had it quite a long time, well, until I got married, I'm sure.

And did your mother work?

Yes, in the chip shop. Cos it was my aunty's chip shop, wasn't it, so my mother used to go and work there. So then we used to, you know when you think back, Billy and I, Mrs Lewis the vet, there used to be a vet next door, and Mrs Lewis used to do sewing in the bedroom, and you know we used to jump on the bed, cos if Dad hadn't come home on time, she'd be had up now, if you think, she used to leave us and go, Mrs Lewis, she used to look after us you see. And she used to shout, 'Get in that bed!' And we used to think 'how the heck does she know we're up?' Well, she could hear, couldn't she, you know.

So she used to come in and then just leave you?

No, she used to be there, there was only that much room between us, we were in the back bedroom here and then she was sewing there. So Mam used to keep the window open, you see, the little window, and she used to shout and then dad would come sometimes. Mam would have to go to work, you see, by six I suppose. We'd be in bed by then.

Six o'clock in the evening, jumping on the bed?

Yes, and then dad would come home about half past six, you see, and we'd be there for half an hour.

So your parents were working the whole time you were growing up? Both of them?

Oh, yes, yes.

Your mother wasn't at home at all, was she?

Well, they opened three days, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday I think it was. And then she'd go in the day to work, wouldn't she, and we'd be in school, and then we'd have tea and Mam would go at six till about half past nine, quarter to ten. And then dad would be out working all day.

14:19

So did you miss your parents or did you just not think about it?

Well, she was home, you know, no we were all right. We used to go with her sometimes.

Did she work because she needed the money?

Oh, yes, yes. Not much money, not much money then. And then dad got a job with the calor gas, delivering gas. She used to have to juggle the shop and go to work, she'd have to close here sometimes to go to work.

So where was the shop?

In that front room there.

So it was in the house?

Yes, you know it was a shop front then, and when they finished they made it into a room like, you know. That was the shop, in there.

How old were you when you left school?

Fifteen.

Were you in the same school the whole time?

No, I went to the grammar school when I was eleven.

In Llanrwst there was an infants and a juniors and the grammar school was ?

Yes, in that school there (indicating behind her house) and the grammar school was right up on the top. The doctors are there now. It's a doctor's surgery now.

So it's not a school any more?

No, this school is still here, where we went, and then there was another school, a National school, up by Cae Person that was. But that's where Billy and I went cos it was only up the back. You know they only had to take us there, across the wall, and we were in school.

Was Billy older or younger than you?

Younger.

So you were in different years in school?

Nearly two years.

Did you get on?

Oh, sometimes, yes. No, not bad, you know.

Why did you leave school at fifteen?

Everybody left school. Oh, I couldn't wait to leave school, you know, oh, I hated school.

Why was that?

Well, I don't know. Here I was alright, because I could do the work, I was quite good there, I was in the top half there. But when I came, there was a lot of people, you know, better than me, so I was in the bottom half. Oh, I couldn't wait to leave school. My mother said, 'well, I'm telling you now,' she said, 'if you can't get a job you'll have to go back to school' Well, I thought, oh, I'll go scrubbing toilets before I go back. And then I had a job in the bakehouse, with the cafe.

07:06

So that was your first job?

Oh, yes, I'd have done anything, anything, rather than go back.

Did you get that pretty much straight away then after leaving school?

Yes, about three weeks. And I thought there's no way I'm going back to that school. So, yes, about three weeks and I stayed, I was there for, how long was I there, oh about twelve months, I'm sure. And then there wasn't enough work so he said 'I've got to let one of you go.' I was the last in so, and I think I was home for about three weeks and I had a job in the other bakehouse and then I was there until I was nineteen I think. And then I went to Dolgarrog to work.

So when you say bakehouse, do you mean you were baking bread?

Yes, bread. We used to be busy on a Saturday, and everybody wanted to finish, to go, oh, Swallow Falls then used to ring sometimes with an order for ten, a dozen cakes, you know. Mr ?? used to go mad. We used to have to start then baking cakes for them.

So you had to stay behind in work to finish orders?

Oh, yes, we had to stay. And you know, when I first started working in the cafe, because it was like an apprentice, you were a skivvy, one pound seven and six. These laugh at me, one pound seven and six.

And that was a week?

A week. And that from half seven in the morning till sometimes six at night.

So were you still living at home?

Yes.

Did you give any money to your parents out of your wages?

Yes, I gave my mother the pound.

So that left you with the seven and six.

Yes. And then we'd go to the dance, that was half a crown for the bus, to Swallow, and half a crown to go in. That was it, it had all gone in one night. But you know, when you think, we had no money to go, like, drinking, nothing like that, but we were quite happy to go to Swallow, to the dance.

So you used to go on a Saturday night?

Yes, every Saturday.

Who did you go with?

With the girls.

Girls from work?

No, my friends, anybody, you know, there'd be a bus full of us, we'd have a good laugh.

So did you enjoy that?

Oh, yes. I used to love it. And I went in there, funny enough, this year and I how it's changed, when we used to go, there used to be big holes in the floor. There used to be like, I don't know, props to hold the roof up, you know, pillars like. And there used to be holes around these. And there used to be mountain rescue coming, you see, the forestry camp, there's a bit forestry camp there. Oh we did have fun. You know, now they've got to have beer and drink and all that, but

It wasn't like that in those days?

We had no money to buy it, you know. But we had a good time, you know.

10:35

So when you left the bakery, the second bakery, did they make you redundant, did you say?

No, I left there to go to Dolgarrog because we wanted to get married. So I was about nineteen, was I, must have been about eighteen, nineteen, and then Dolgarrog you see that was about five pound a week, it was a lot of money, you know, it was a lot more.

So you'd met a boyfriend while you were in the bakery?

Yes, I was about seventeen I think. And then we thought we'd get married, but then you had to be twenty one didn't you.

Did you? To get married?

Well, to get married without your mother's permission kind of thing, you know, so nearly everybody was twenty one.

So you had to wait, did you, till twenty one? You didn't ask your mother's permission?

Oh, no, you were allowed to get married then, you see, when you were twenty one. Then you didn't have to have nobody's permission.

11:42 *So where was, Tony was it, your husband working?*

He was in Dolgarrog.

He was already in Dolgarrog?

Yes, because he came home from, you had to do National Service, then, didn't you, so he came home and he was in Dolgarrog. So quite good money between us, you know, then.

How did you get the job in Dolgarrog?

Well, I just happened to ask somebody. Who was it? Oh, we had to go to church then, you know, and the fella that was the verger there, I said to him 'Oh, any jobs going in Dolgarrog?' 'Oh I'll have a look for you Mary,' he said, and fair dos, he came back and said 'Come down and see them,' Friday or something, so I had a day off from the bakehouse to go and I had the job, I started Monday. It was as easy as that.

Was it a formal interview?

Yes, I had to see somebody, I had to go and see the personnel like, you know.

How did you find it, going for an interview?

Well, it was nerve-racking really because, well, I'd never had an interview really, just walked in, didn't you, to a job. And all they asked, were you willing to work, cos we did shifts, didn't we, six till two, and two till ten. Oh it was hard going, that morning shift.

So how did you feel when you got the job? Were you glad?

Oh, I was glad really, yes. Well, we wanted the money didn't we. And I was thinking, now, the wages went up then, yes, when I was leaving kind of thing, it was nine pound a week, and if you worked Saturday morning you had eleven pound, which was a lot of money then.

13:30 *What year was this, roughly?*

I left Dolgarrog to have Angie, didn't I, she was born 1964, just after Christmas I left. I went back for a week after Christmas and gave my notice in then. Cos I was having Angie in March, you see.

And what year did you start then?

I think it was about 1959, no I'm lying, I was there three years, so it was 1960 I went there.

Was it very different to the bakehouse?

Oh, yes.

What was your job? What did you have to do?

Really, it was the easiest job I had. The bakehouse was hard work, it was hard work.

Why was it hard?

Well, for a start, you're at it all day, you know, in Dolgarrog all we did was throw the sheets over. Oh, that was the best job I had, honestly.

So what was your job title then? What was your work?

Well, just a labourer really.

You were on a production line?

Yes, it was all a big roll, there was three plants, there was light sheet mill, where most of the girls worked, they were always looking for somebody in the mill, they used to say, 'I want two in the mill, you and you', you know, it was like that, but I didn't care, we had more fun really with the men, you know.

So you had to go . . . ?

From the light sheet mill, yes, we'd have to walk all the way up and go to the mill, with the men, like, you know. But we were only allowed to work on number five and number six, I think, the others were too heavy, like, you know.

So what was the difference, the light work was, what was the light work?

They were only little sheets, you know, little rolls. And we used to roll them thin, thin, and then there was the shears there and things, they'd cut them, you know, cos they'd go a funny shape, cut them to size, and then sometimes we'd have to go to, the circles it was called, where they cut the bottoms out for saucepans, and things like that, presses. And then in the other part, the inspection, where they'd count them and inspect them ready to send out.

16:06

When they sent you to the mill, that was heavier was it?

Yes, it was heavy.

So you had to lift big rolls?

Big sheets. There'd be, well the rolls were about that wide (gesturing with hands to about a two foot width), so the sheets were that wide, kind of thing (gesturing again to about three foot).

And you had to lift them, did you, and put them . . . ?

They'd come out on two trestles, two trestles, they'd come out and then you lifted them up and threw them over to the fella in the front.

And what did he do with them?

Then he pushed it back through the roll didn't he. They'd start like that (making a tube shape with her hands) and then you'd have to, to a certain gauge or something, and every now and again they'd stop. Well Friday, we had to go out on Saturday, didn't we, so you'd have to do your hair, didn't you. So we used to say 'Friday I want to do my hair.' 'Oh come on, you've got to work like heck now', he used to say, you know. So we'd we'd work, you had to do a count, you know, so we'd work hard, you know, all afternoon then, and say, 'toilet', no toilet, we'd all go and come back with rollers and a headscarf.

You made an excuse that you wanted to go to the toilet?

Toilet, yes. We didn't care, some of them were alright, you know, they used to say 'Do your hair, I know where you're going.' But you see, as long as he'd done his count, so we'd work hard all afternoon, like, you know.

So you used to take your rollers into work with you?

Yes, and you'd be working with a girl, you know, and you'd say you wanted to work with her cos she was good, she'd put the rollers in alright. Yes, we'd go back there.

With your rollers in and finish your shift?

Yes. He knew where we were. Finish the shift. And we used to go on the bus to work, the bus went half past five from the square.

To get you in for the six o'clock shift?

Yes.

So what time did you have to get up?

Oh, I used to get up about quarter to five.

So, in the factory, you were rolling out these sheets of aluminium.

Yes.

And what were they made for?

For aircraft and things I think. I know during the war they used to, cos it was all women then, and old men that were too old really for the, but all the women 'shame you're doing this'. I went to work with a women, cleaning the school, when the kids were grown a bit, you know, she used to say some stories you know.

From the same factory?

Yes, well, they were all women there, you see, during the war, cos all the men had gone to war.

Were any of them still there when you were working there?

Well, there were some. Some men had been there all their lives. Some didn't go to the war, did they, they were like home guards or whatever they were.

19:17

So where you were, were you on a factory floor with all women?

Well, the mill was all men. And down in the press there were about four women, I think, they used to work the presses to cut the circles and things out. And we used to do, oh, we had a laugh once. They'd sent some things back and they said 'Hey, look at this, Mary.' 'What?', I said. 'Look at it'. They were laughing. They had sent them back, they used to do squares like that, and there used to be photographs on them, all these naked pictures, you should have seen them, the men were in, they were taking them home. So they'd sent them back, you see, sometimes they would send things back and they'd take them to the recast and they'd melt them down. But these came back, oh my God, you should have seen the photos.

So how come there were naked pictures on them?

Well I don't know, somebody must have been taking photos of whatever, and I think they used to put them onto these, you see, and then, well I don't know what they'd do with them.

So they'd go along to the inspection room and there'd be these naked . . .

No, they'd sent them off plain and then they must have come back to go to the recast. But they had dropped them off there, so they used to melt things back down, you know, and use them, and there was a big big rolling mill there, they used to cut big thick blocks like that of aluminium and they would roll on this thing, oh, it was marvellous to see it, cos it was red hot when it came, you see, out of the recast, yes, and they'd roll it on that, the men never used to touch that, they used to be up in like a box, and they must have pressed buttons or what have you and it used to go up and down.

21:19

So what was the atmosphere there like?

Oh, lovely you know, everybody worked well.

Did you have family working there?

No, I had nobody there, no. Only Tony like, you know, he worked there, Tony's brother worked there, but there were families, you know, there were grandfather and right down.

What was Tony doing?

Oh, he was in the circles, he was, where the presses were, he was on the press. And then he, what do you call it, he used to drive . . .

A crane?

No, not a crane, forklift. That's where he was for years, on the forklift, getting the

stuff, and once they'd finished moving it out and taking it to the inspection.

So did you get married before you started at Dolgarrog or during?

While I was in Dolgarrog we got married.

How old were you then?

Twenty-one, twenty one, yes, a long time ago.

Did you invite friends from the factory?

Oh, yes. They all came. But now I mean, one granddaughter's married, she's got two little boys, the other granddaughter's getting married in May, and I thought, what a difference now. They want this, they want that, they want favours.

It was different then?

Yes, we had a meal in the Vic and that was it.

Did you go on honeymoon?

Yes, we went to London.

How long for?

About four days. We had to come home then, no money. The money had run out.

Where did you live?

I lived in Peterwood Flats, just up the road here, and then when I had Angela we heard we'd had a house, council house then of course, so we went up to Cae Tyddyn, we were there oh, well I've been here seven years, so we were there forty odd years.

So were you renting, or did you buy, oh no, it was a council house you said?

Council house, yes, but we bought it, you had the right to buy then, didn't you. Bought it for six thousand, because you'd paid so much rent, you had so much off.

So, the girls you were working with at the factory, were you working with school friends you'd known before?

Oh, yes, there was a lot of them there. Well that was the thing, then, I mean everybody went to Dolgarrog, yes, I knew them all.

24:00

Do you remember your very first day and how you felt?

Going to Dolgarrog? Oh, yes, do you know the first day they said 'I need somebody in the mill' and I didn't know, I didn't know anything then, you know, I'd followed the girls into work and I thought 'The mill? I don't know where it is.' So I remember this Pauline, her name was, she said 'Oh come on, you've got to come to the mill with me.' 'OK' I said and I went, and you know, I'll never forget. I stood by the, you know,

these two pieces of wood that come out like a trestle, and this sheet came out, oh, I can feel it now. And it hit me. Oh, the pain, I thought 'Oh God, what's happened?' But you had to stand you see, cos the trestle, the sheet was about that much over both sides, it was just a support, wasn't it, wide and then it came narrow towards the end. I can still feel it, you know, what I was saying, the force it comes out, you know. And I didn't know what to do, did I? So she said 'Pick it up.' Nobody showed you, you know. So she said 'Pick it up' so I picked it up, and if you're not quick enough, cos you've got two sheets, one's going over while the other's coming, it's a continuous thing.

So you didn't have any training?

No, nothing. So if you're not quick enough the other sheet comes out. Oh, and then there's a big mark on the sheet and it's no good, is it.

So this woman that told you to pick it up, was she supposed to be showing you what to do?

Well, nobody showed me. It was just get in there and do it. No health and safety then.

So you didn't have to report the fact that the sheet had hit you or anything?

No. And then, like, you had bags on your hands, well, I didn't know, she said 'Put the gloves on', well I thought 'Gloves!', they were two bags.

Plastic?

No, cotton. Cotton bags on your hands. And in time you get used, you'd tuck them in so that you can hold them on, well, these bags, as soon as went like that, the gloves had gone. And you know, when you think, they were spiteful, they didn't help you.

So they let you find out . . .

Oh, the hard way.

26:55

Did that happen to everybody?

Most probably.

So how long did it take you to pick things up?

Not long I can tell you. I never stood by that trestle again. But you know, they should warn you shouldn't they, but no, nobody warned you.

Did you have cuts on your hands and things like that sometimes?

You could have, you know, a nasty cut, but that's why they had to wear these bags. But if you tucked them in, you know, your finger would go in one and then you'd tuck them in. Like oven gloves they were.

Were there any health and safety regulations?

No, nothing really.

What happened if somebody got seriously hurt? Because I imagine with the machinery and everything.

Well, there was like first aid, you know, a little room where you went if there was something wrong, but I don't think there was anyone qualified, like a first aider or a doctor, it was just people who'd been to the Red Cross or something.

Do you remember anybody having accidents?

Only one, I remember he was an electrician, and there was something wrong with the lights. Oh, and I'll always remember it, and he went up, you see, to do it, and he had a shock. Oh, God, it threw him, he was off work for months, done something to his back and he'd burned all his hands and his face.

So did you see that?

Yes, it just threw him right across and he'd gone properly on this thing to raise him up. Threw him right across.

What happened, did they take him to hospital?

Yes, they took him to hospital. And there's two or three caught their hands on the, lost a finger and things, on the shears.

Cutting out the aluminium?

Yes, well, no, it was like a big. um. . .

Guillotine?

Yes, guillotine thing, and then you'd just put them in. You had to turn them round and things to cut them to certain sizes, you know.

Was there any compensation when things like that happened?

I don't know. Well, I remember once, I think I was having Angela, and you're supposed to have, there was holes in the floor in the mill, and you put these two slats like and then you put the sheets, when they'd finished, you'd put them on there, and they came with the forklift to pick them up. They'd brought them to the light sheet mill now and there was two big rolls there and there was no holes in the floor, and I remember the thing fell on my leg, and I remember I had twenty pounds, twenty pounds, that was quite a lot of money then, you know.

29:57

So that was some sort of compensation?

Yes. The union used to do it. There was a couple of strikes when I was there.

Was there a union already there when you went in?

Yes, a union. I think there'd been a union there for years.

Did you join?

Yes, well you had to.

You had to?

Yes.

Did anybody not join?

I don't know, you know. I think they just took it out of your wages.

You had to pay something?

You had to pay to join, yes.

What were the strikes over, do you remember?

One was they'd sacked this old man. They said they'd sacked him and everybody said well, no, it's not on. So everybody walked out onto the grass, everybody walked out. And then they reinstated this man but, to be honest, he was a rogue of a man. He, what did he do one year, oh, 'Do you want to buy a raffle?' 'What for, Bill?' A sheep, a whole sheep. Well, handy you know, coming Christmas. Well that was it, it was a fella travelling with Tony that won this raffle, so he said 'Where do I get the sheep?' 'Oh,' he said, 'it's in a field on the way home', in this field, you know, on the way to Dolgarrog. So he said, 'What do you mean? I thought we were having a bloody lamb!' And when they got there, he said 'Oh, no, you've got to sort it out yourself.' This sheep. When they got there, there was no sheep, just a nanny goat. He was awful you know, everybody in the works had bought a raffle and he'd spent the money gambling. Yes, he was a hell of a man.

So what happened?

Nothing. That's why they were sacking him, more or less, but they all said it shouldn't be, so they all went out on strike.

All the factory walked out?

Walked out, everybody.

Did the managers come and talk?

No, everybody just walked out and they stayed out about an hour or so, and everybody went back after.

When they knew the man had been reinstated?

Yes. He was such a rogue but you couldn't help but like him, you know what I mean. He was the type who would do the same thing again next year and everybody would fall for it again, and still buy off him, ha, ha. It was nice to work there, you know, it was a lot of fun. Some of the girls you worked with, when you get a gang of women,

be honest, they're bitchy aren't they? You know what I mean, sometimes I would rather go to the mill because the men didn't bother, you had a laugh with them, you know, they'd swear and you just took it, didn't you, you didn't take any notice. I remember one, oh, there was one young fella there and he was getting married, and I could hear all this banging, and I said to the fella 'What's the matter?' And he said, 'Oh, close your eyes.' 'Close my eyes', I said, 'why?' Oh, laugh. They'd stripped him, you know, and they used to put thick grease in the rolling mill, like, where they turned, they had to have this thick grease, oh, they'd covered him, you know, he was stark naked. Oh, and he was a proper dinewid little boy, bechod.'

This was in the mill with the men?

In the mill, yes, they were awful you know, they did terrible things, you know. But you just took it, you know.

So did the girls play tricks on each other?

No. Oh, there was one girl there, oh she was a funny girl, she was getting married and I said 'Oh, don't do no tricks on her, you know what she's like.' So what they did, they'd bought like coloured rags and all they did was pin them on her coat. Oh, she sulked and the boyfriend came down and I thought, you know, what's the matter with them?

She wasn't very happy?

No. And I mean it was nothing, it was just pin some things on her coat, you know.

When you say coat, do you mean uniform?

We never had a uniform.

You didn't have a uniform?

No. Just went in what, you know.

Did that change?

I don't know, not when I was there, you just wore what you had.

34:49

So the only protective clothing you had were the gloves?

Gloves.

And on your feet?

Ordinary shoes. It came out after, didn't it, that you had to have these Toetector things. I remember Tony had to have them, Toetector shoes, you know. No, we never had nothing, used to go in sandals in the summer. Mind you, when you think I've stood in high heels, no wonder my back's the way it is, ha, ha, you know, eight hours.

It's a long time. Did you do, cos you said it was shift work, did you do one shift one week and a different shift the next week?

Yes, we did afternoons one week and then mornings the following week.

What was that like, doing shift work?

Oh, it was alright really, you get used to it.

Which did you prefer, mornings or afternoons?

Oh, the afternoons I did, I didn't like getting up. It's early you know and you know when you're young, you go to the pictures, half past ten or eleven coming home, the morning soon comes doesn't it. The only thing with afternoons, cos there used to be a picture house here then, it was a bit maddening if there was something you wanted to see.

So you couldn't go that whole week and the next week the picture would have gone?

But you know when you think there's nothing here now, like when I was young, there used to be pictures here and they used to change Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I feel sorry for these kids now cos there's nothing.

So you had a cinema and you had three separate pictures a week?

It used to change three times a week, yes, there used to be three films a week. So where that ??? is now, that's where it was.

How many times a week did you go to the cinema?

We went three times. Well, if you think, it was only five pence.

A shilling to get in?

A shilling to get in, yes. And you could get in for seven pence if you went and sat at the front, and the shilling was further back. And one and nine, you were well off then.

So which did you do?

Oh, in the sevens very often, yes.

Who did you go with?

Oh a gang of us, the girls, gang of boys, you know, all friends, but you see we had nothing to do here. There was no pubs on a Sunday, there was nothing like that. So on a Sunday, there was a milk bar next door but one here and we'd all meet there on Sunday night and she'd close about six, half past six, we'd all go for a walk then. Well, from Betws or we'd all go round Trefor, you know, but now they don't do nothing like that do they? We'd all go and have a laugh, you know, all together just for a walk.

So did you always, when you were on the morning shift and you'd been out the night before, did you always manage to get up in time?

Always. I was quite good really. Mind you, my mother used to call me. She called me once, I was late, and you could go in up to seven o'clock, so there used to be a bus about quarter to seven, and fair play, there were some good fellas in the time office, they'd come to the end, out of the time office to the end, and - you been to Dolgarrog? - well the road, and then you have to walk down, about five minutes walk, to the works, and they'd come to the end, fair dos, you know, and they'd clock you in so you don't, otherwise you'd lose quarter of an hour. They were quite good, fair dos. And I remember I said, "oh, I mustn't get up late tomorrow Mam, I was late today." Anyway, she called me "Mary", she said "Come on," and I got up, got ready, and every Tuesday the bus used to go from, cos there used to be a market here, the bus used to go from Watling Street, so I went and thought 'I'm sure this bus has gone' cos it was quiet, you know, there was nobody around and I thought 'Oh, I hope I haven't missed it again today'. The next thing I heard my mother "Mary, Mary". "What's the matter Mam?" "Come back, I've got up too early, it's only half past four." Ha, ha, I had to come back. I thought 'No way am I going back to bed' so I sat on the sofa waiting to go.

So when you say there was a bus, was that the ...

Crossville then.

Crossville. It wasn't a special factory bus?

No, no, it was the Crossville bus. And on a Saturday morning, if you went in on a Saturday morning, the bus never used to come. So you had to go down to the depot to get it, what difference that made I don't know.

So the company didn't pay your bus fare?

No, it was one and nine a day.

And that bus in the morning, would it be full of people going to Dolgarrog.

There was two buses.

Two buses just going to the factory?

Well, no-one had cars, did they? So everybody went on the bus. And then they stopped the buses cos people were getting cars, you know, later on now, when Tony was going I mean. And then you had to look for a lift, cos Tony never drove, so they used to pay petrol, like, to people.

They stopped the buses altogether eventually did they?

Yes. Well, it wasn't paying them I don't suppose. There'd only be a couple on the bus.

And the company didn't think of putting on a bus?

Well, it wasn't paying I don't suppose. No they never put a bus on. So it was a job, and say somebody was, you were off and I was travelling with you, it was, like Tony

said, "I've been off on Saturday and Sunday and I don't know who's going", then he'd have to try and look for a lift, and you went "Can I have a lift", you know. It was a blooming nuisance really. When you went on the bus you were independent, weren't you.

41:36

So did you ever fail to get a lift in?

Well, I was alright, the buses were running you see. Tony wasn't. I've seen him coming home soaking wet, he used to come down to the bridge and hope there was somebody, you know, chancing a lift.

So he had to walk?

He has walked before.

When you said the guys would clock you in, did you have a machine to clock in?

Yes.

So they'd do that for you?

Yes, and then, yes, you had to clock in and out.

Did you have to clock in for dinner break as well?

Oh, no, we used to have half an hour for your lunch and then you had ten minutes tea break.

In the morning and the afternoon?

Yes, you'd have one about half past seven or eight o'clock, then you'd have your dinner at ten o'clock to half past, and on the afternoon shift it was four o'clock I think to ten past and the other one was six to half past six.

Did you have to take your own food?

There was a canteen there, yes, there was a canteen. You didn't have to take your own sandwiches.

Did you have to pay for the food in the canteen?

Yes.

What was it like?

It was alright, yes, it was good, it was alright, fine.

Did they have cooks?

Yes, there used to be two women on every shift, and on the night shift. There was three shifts then, you see. Yes, cos Tony used to do three shifts in the beginning and then they dropped it down to just two. I think it was just the men in the recast that

used to work three shifts.

43:40

You were an unskilled worker I take it, were you?

Oh, yes.

Was every body unskilled or did some people have skilled jobs?

Well, I don't know. There was some in the recast, I suppose you had to have some kind of skill because they were melting the aluminium, weren't they, but no, there was nothing like skilled I don't think.

So you just learned on the job as you went along?

As you went along, yes.

Did you train anybody yourself, new people coming in?

No. Just told them not to stand too near, ha,ha.

That was it?

Yes. No there was nothing, nobody really, skilled you know. Cos I think the men, even on the front of the roll . . .

Were not skilled?

No.

What was the management like?

Alright I suppose, you know, very rarely saw them.

So you had a supervisor did you on the shop floor?

Yes, there was like a charge hand and the foreman, would it be.

So did they come around and keep an eye on you?

They were on the shift, yes, they were on the shift. Some were alright, some were, you know, but some were alright, you know.

Did you have a quota to meet at the end of every day?

I think they did like a count, they called it, and there was one girl who worked with us, we had to stay in the light sheet mill, and "I want one here," everybody did a hundred, say a hundred, she'd do a hundred and twenty, everybody hated working with her, and instead of rolling them say twenty times, she'd roll them thirty times.

She wanted more money or ?

No, and then it went on time and motion didn't it. They were all at it then, weren't

they, yes, it went on time and motion.

So the more you did the more you got?

Yes. But then I left.

Did you leave then to have your children?

Yes. I left to have Angela yes.

And did you go back?

No. We didn't go back to work then. There was no, like, I think had maternity pay for six weeks or something after she was born but that was it then you know.

46:00

Were you at home the whole time your children were growing up?

I was at home till, well, I went back to the bakehouse because the husband died, he was only thirty-eight, and he had a brain tumour, and she had little children so I went back to give her a hand like, you know, in the bakehouse. And then when Alison was three I went back to work in the factory. In that rubber factory. When she was three and I worked every day since till I finished, like.

So you were in the rubber factory afterwards, for how many years?

I was there about, well, I think twelve months. So then it was finishing, and you didn't know, so I went to work in the chip shop with my aunty, went to work with her then.

Did you stay there then?

Till she finished and then when she sold it they wanted me to stay but I said 'Oh, no. I've done, I've finished there.' And then I went to work in the cafe over the bridge and I was there for years, the little cafe over there.

Were you happy to leave Dolgarrog to have your children?

Yes, but I loved it there you know.

What did you like about it?

I don't know it was just, I'd never worked with a lot of people, had I, I'd only been in the bakehouse, there was two of us and the man who owned it. I'd worked in the cafe, there was only us three there. Never worked with a lot of people, you know, and I enjoyed that then you know.

You didn't find it difficult?

No, I liked the fun and the laugh, yes, I enjoyed it there. And that was the easiest job I've ever had.

Did they have Christmas parties there?

No, they never used to, when you think, no, there was nothing.

Did they give you a bonus at Christmas?

No, nothing. You had two weeks holiday and that was it, or whatever it was, you know, you had your holiday pay and that was it. Oh, no, you had nothing.

48:23

So you had you two weeks, a year was that?

Yes. Usually first two weeks in August or last week in July, first week in August.

What did you used to do? Did you used to go away?

When I'd left, and the children had grown a bit, we'd go on holiday then, but no, we never, well, you didn't have money, you see. What you had, you spent every week, you know. When you think, well, we were poor really, we were poor.

Did you not think of going back to work at the factory after you'd had your children or was there no-one to look after them?

There was nobody, was there. I went to work in that rubber factory and my mother, I said to my mother, you know Angela had gone to school then, and then, Alison was three, so I used to, oh, I used to run down here now, cos we had to go to Bethesda for this training.

For the rubber factory?

Yes, and the bus was going eight o'clock, so you can imagine getting two kids ready, can't you, and myself ready. So half past seven I'd be on the road, I'd be running down here and dropping them off here for my mother, many a day poor Alison wasn't dressed, she'd be in her pyjamas and I'd put a coat and things on and bring her clothes, you know. When you think, for a couple of quid, you know. Yes, but it was alright I suppose. And then, once you'd done your six weeks, the bus was going for six weeks I think we went, then we went down here, well it was easier, started eight, but it wasn't so bad, didn't have a bus to catch.

So you went to Bethesda for this training?

Llanberis.

Llanberis? That was the main office was it?

That must have been the main factory. But you know, I honestly couldn't tell you what it was called.

But you did the first six weeks in Llanberis? Every day you caught the bus?

Every day, to go to Llanberis. And then you'd come home very night and I'd say to my mother, oh be so grateful, oh my mother was good, you know. "Here, I've made some lobsous for you", so I didn't have to make food that night, you know. Go home then and you'd have to get the things ready for the next day, didn't you.

But afterwards you worked in Llanrwst?

Yes, it was down by the old tannery there.

So did you walk?

Yes, I'd run down with the kids, like, drop them off there and then go to work till five.

51:08

What were you doing in the rubber factory?

I was a stripper.

A stripper? What did that entail?

Yes, Tony used to be quite proud, ha, ha. What it was, you had to put this stuff on the seams, you had to strip this material off so that it was just the waterproof and then they used to put this tape on, you know, you know how you get tape down the seams, so somebody else used to put, but we had to strip the stuff off like, you know.

Did you? So was it difficult?

It was alright once you knew. Sometimes it was awful, it used to stick, the material used to stick, you know, but once you'd made the hole, you just put the stripper thing in, yes, it was alright, a good laugh. But you know, we must have been high, you know, because you know the smell of the glue, we'd all be laughing, we'd all be having a good time but when you see this glue sniffing now, I was saying to this girl the other day, "you know we must have been high, mustn't we?" "Well, aye, when you think", she said, but we were all happy there, you know.

So was it all girls again in the rubber factory?

Yes. All girls.

Was it a big factory?

Well, there'd be, I'm sure there'd be about twenty there.

Was it a long day? Was it the same hours?

Yes. We went eight till five, finished five o'clock, then I think we'd have half an hour for your dinner so I used to try and run home here to.

So you used to come home for dinner?

Yes, I'd try to run home here and my mother'd have a sandwich ready and then on a Tuesday and a Friday my mother was working wasn't she so my mother used to take Alison with her to the chip shop and everybody'd look after her in the back.

Did you enjoy the rubber place as much as Dolgarrog?

Oh, no. Dolgarrog I enjoyed, you know, and like I said it was the easiest job because, well, anything with food is hard, isn't it, you know, it's hard work. And they I cleaned the school and that was hard work.

So was the rubber factory very different from Dolgarrog?

It was a different kind of thing you know.

A different atmosphere?

It was all girls there, wasn't it, it was alright.

Was there a different system of working? Did you have more health and safety there or . . . ?

No, there was nothing there, it's now really this health and safety's come in, isn't it.

And the wages in the rubber factory?

Um, I think that was about six pounds, six pound, something like that, or seven pounds.

And you'd left Dolgarrog, you said, on nine, wasn't it?

Nine pounds.

So you'd gone down.

Yes, it was nine pounds when I, yes, it was. But you were on like a bonus in this rubber factory and one week I remember he said "There's only one person here made bonus", you know. . . me. But what it was, you'd had a lot back, or something, we'd had to do it twice, so you had to put the numbers down, you know, so you did them quicker. So eleven pound, I had, eleven pound. When you think what you've done for little money.

54:00

Did you have to work weekends there, as well, or just Monday to Friday?

No, no, mind you, the only time we worked a weekend, in Dolgarrog, was a Saturday, we never worked Sunday, just a Saturday morning if they wanted you in. Only the men worked Sunday.

I imagine Dolgarrog would be quite noisy?

Oh, it was terrible. And hot in summer. Oh, terrible.

They didn't give you any ear protection?

We had nothing.

When you say hot in the summer, was that because the sun came in?

It was, well it's hot there anyway, cos of the machines going, the heat from the thing,

oh the heat, and it was like a corrugated roof, keeping the heat you know. It was terrible there in the summer, sweating bucket loads, then they painted all the top, painted all the windows to try and keep the sun out.

So the windows were black then, were they, or white?

Black, yes, black. They'd painted them and then there was lights there all day, you know, that makes heat, doesn't it.

In the rubber factory there wasn't that sort of noise, I imagine?

There was no noise there, nothing.

So was it more comfortable to work there?

Yes, it was alright, only for the glue.

Did you ever feel that you had a headache?

Well, it was just that we were laughing all day. We must have been on a high, when you think. Reading about glue sniffing and things, we must have been doing it, mustn't we?

A lot of the women I've spoken to have talked about listening to the radio and singing while they worked, did you do that?

Yes, in the bakehouse we did, oh yes, we had it on all day. And the first boss we had, Mr Mitchell, oh we used to laugh. You know in the winter, it was not as busy like in the summer, and he used to say "If you're not busy, look busy." So Lyn and I working, and we used to be bored stiff, you'd think he'd send us home, and then we'd hear him coming, we always knew he was coming cos he used to whistle, so we'd jump up, we were sat down, me and Lyn, we'd jump up and we'd get a cloth, always had a cloth, he was quite happy then you see. We weren't doing anything, "if you're not busy, look busy." I often think when I'm sitting here sometimes, if you're not busy, look busy.

I guess that wasn't the case in the factories though was it?

No.

You were busy all the time?

Yes. Oh, yes, you worked, you know, you worked from six till two.

55:00 *Were you sitting down?*

No, standing.

The whole time?

Yes.

And in the rubber factory too?

Yes, standing. The girls on the machine were sat, you know, but we stood, yes, we stood by this table all day.

And you were a year, did you say, in the rubber factory?

Yes.

Why did you leave there?

Well, Tony's sister, they made her a charge hand like, and then she was, pick on me, pick on me, you know.

Oh, so she was working there as a sort of supervisor?

And then I said to Tony "Oh, I'm going to . ." "Oh, jack it in" he said. She was nasty, you know what I mean, she was, er, "You do this", she thought she could boss me, you know, relations, cos I remember I worked for my uncle, and anything wrong, he'd take it out on me. I'd say "It wasn't me that's done it", Well, you should know better" kind of thing, as if they can, you know, relations think they can pick you on you. So I packed it in then and my aunty said "Oh, come here" you know, a few hours, which suited me better really cos the girls were going to school then and it fitted in, I was home and I didn't have to ask anybody to look after them like, you know.

So that charge hand, was that the only time that had happened to you?

Yes.

Had you always got on with your supervisors?

Oh, always, yes, got on alright.

So, in Dolgarrog, I know it was noisy, but were people able to talk to each other on the factory floor or could you not hear each other speaking?

Well, it wasn't bad you know, well, you did sign language more or less. Oh, you could speak, well, we were in this distance (gesturing) so you could hear what I was saying.

And were people allowed to have a cup of tea, for instance, at the machines?

No.

60:00

Did people smoke at the machines?

Yes, I think they did.

Did you, or were you not a smoker?

Yes.

You did?

Yes, oh yes, they used to smoke. When you think, all that grease and things, good God, ha, ha.

And in the rubber factory, did you smoke while you were working?

No, I think you had to go out then, I'm sure, or upstairs. Toilet or canteen, you know. You can't smoke anywhere now, can you? I don't know, I don't smoke now.

Did the rubber factory, I know you said Dolgarrog didn't do anything for Christmas, no outings or anything . .

Oh, we had a good do with the rubber factory, because the Llanberis lot, and they had a do so we joined them, I think Caernarfon or somewhere we went, in a big hotel.

Was that for Christmas?

Yes.

So the company transported you and paid for everything?

Yes, they paid for everything, we had a good night out there, yes, fair dos. I wish I could remember, I can't remember, the name of it. I don't think I ever knew what the name was, I often think is it still there, but people don't wear things like that nowadays do they? Big railway coats.

So, on the whole, have you enjoyed factory work?

Oh, yes.

Do you wish you'd done something different?

No, I've been alright. I enjoyed it really.

And when you started in the factory, were your parents happy that you were doing factory work?

Yes, my mother wasn't bothered. She said "How the heck are you going to get up?" "I'll get up", I managed.

And when you had your children, two girls?

Mm.

Would you have wanted them to work in the same way as you or did you encourage them to do something different?

Well, as long as they were happy I didn't care what they did. One went to college to do hairdressing and Alison, all she ever wanted was to work with old people.

And is that what she's doing?

Yes, since she left school, and she's done it every day since. She's had two children but she's had the time off and she's gone back to work. And she's doing alright, she goes round the homes assessing if there's something wrong, you know. She loves it.

63:00

So looking back over your years in the factory, are there any stories of memories that you can think of that I haven't asked you?

No, I don't think so, no. We did have fun, you know. It was good fun.

Is that what you remember, the fun?

Oh, yes. I enjoyed it you know and then you met people, like, there used to be a lot of people coming, travelling, well I was in the mill mostly, but the lads used to come from Bethesda, from Blaenau, they'd come from all round you know.

To work at Dolgarrog?

Yes. There was a lot from Bethesda and from Llanberis they used to come. But I suppose that was all there was round here then. And they'd come from Llandudno.

There was about a thousand people there wasn't there?

At one time, I'm sure.

So was the language English or Welsh?

It was a bit of both.

What did you speak?

English. I could speak Welsh with Welsh people, like, but my father was Scotch wasn't he so we had to speak English in the house. Then it was ignorant, you see, if you spoke Welsh in front of . .

So you spoke English in the factory as well?

Yes, well most of them were English, you know.

And with Tony, did you speak English or Welsh? English?

Yes, English with Tony, yes. But like my mother, if it was me and my mother, my mother would speak Welsh to me. Or she didn't want my father to know and he used to laugh, he used to say to me after, "I don't know what the hell she's telling you in Welsh for, I know everything she's saying." He'd been here that long.

He'd picked it up?

Mm. And I used to say "How did you know, Dad, you know, so and so?" "In the pub", he'd go for a pint, and he'd say they were talking about so and so. And I used to think, "Well, they speak all Welsh, how did you know, Dad?" And he'd say "Oh, you know, you can piece this word and that word, and you know, so and so." Well,

he'd been here, hadn't he, fifty odd years.

So did you pass your Welsh onto your Children or not?

They can understand, yes, they can understand. But now the school here is all Welsh you see. And it's so funny, you know, cos there's little Polish children, there's Indian children, there's Chinese children here, and it's so funny, I've been standing there waiting for my grand-daughter and they come out speaking Welsh, it's lovely to hear them.

So are you still in contact with any of the people you worked with in the factories, do you see them around Llanrwst?

Oh, I see them, yes.

Are there still a lot around?

There's still a few, yes.

And if you're chatting do you talk about the old times in the factory?

Sometimes, you know, sometimes. Well, we all worked in Dolgarrog, that was the only thing then, you see, there was nothing unless you went to, you either went to college or you went to Dolgarrog. I wasn't brainy enough to go to college, ha, ha.

67:00

Okay, Mary, that's lovely. Thank you very much.