

LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Morris Motors, Felinfoel, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire

(1960 – 1971 on day shift, and afterwards as a part-time worker)

Interviewee: VSW006 (NB: WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS)

Date: 20.11.13

Interviewer: Susan Roberts ar ran Archif Menywod Cymru

00.00.40 We'll go back to the beginning then. If you can tell me what your date of birth is.

Fourth of the twelfth, nineteen forty four.

And where were you born?

Felinfoel.

And what was your father's occupation?

Labourer. Just put labourer then.

He was a labourer. And did your mother work?

No.

What about brothers and sisters then.

I've only got two sisters.

And where did you go to school?

Felinfoel.

And how old were you when you left school?

Fifteen.

And what did you do after you left school?

I left school in 1959 and I started on the 18th January 1960.

Where did you start?

In Morris Motors.

And how did you feel about leaving school?

I was looking forward to it.

You were ready then? So you said you got a job in Morris Motors, how did you get the job?

My mother

Your mother went about getting the job for you. Did she go in?

Yes, she went in to see the boss. *The superintendent.*

Did you have to go and see him then?

Yes.

And was there some sort of a test or interview?

No. Just asked me normal questions, you know, just an ordinary interview. And he said start. It was a long time ago.

00.02.14: And how did you feel about starting?

I was looking forward to it.

Did you feel nervous?

No.

00.02.24: So can you describe your first day? I know it was a long time ago.

I started on the jigs, on the B type, in shop 3.

Did somebody show you what to do?

I was shown what to do, but only somebody saying you just, I used to fan the gills and just fan them in like that you see. And then you turn the jig round and you tube in there then you put them there then for somebody to pick them up, to be pleated you see.

00.02.57: So who were you working with?

There was a lot of women. It was me and this other women that started the same day. We were always together. And we were friends. And then I was there a couple of weeks, when I was taken off to to pack construction. A new place opened up the top of Shop Three. And I was on the jig type then that was on a machine with a pedal, and you had to get the gills and the tubes and go like this and I was doing the radiators, where this other girl was pleating them. There was only two of us there for a long time before they had other jigs and employed other people to come there.

00.03.41: Were you happy about being moved then?

I didn't mind. I quite like it you know. It was quite good.

What time did you start?

We started at half past seven in the morning. And we were on piece work when we started. So the more you done the more money you'd earn.

00.04.01: Can you remember how much you were paid?

When I started there, three pound fifty. *Three pound ten shillings.* Yes, three pound ten shillings you see.

00.04.10: Three pound ten shillings for what then?

For the week. That was good money in those days then see. Excellent.

00.04.20: So you were fifteen years old and you were earning three pounds ten shillings is it? So what would you do with the money then?

Well, I had to give my mother some, for the keep. And then try and save a bit myself, you know. And of course, I had to buy my clothes and things you know.

What did you wear in work?

You took your own apron. You wore your own clothes. And we had overalls. We had green overalls.

00.04.49: Did they give them to you?

Because when I started there I didn't have an overall then. I just had like an apron over my own clothes. But then I was given an overall then. It was a green overall. Thick *green cotton*. Thick. Cotton green overall.

00.05.05: But everybody wore the same.

Everybody wore the same.

00.05.08: Did you have to wash it yourself?

Yes.

00.05.13: So how did you feel about working in the factory?

Well, I didn't want to do anything else. You know, it was just that it was good for me. And I enjoyed it. I wouldn't have wanted to have gone anywhere else.

00.05.26: How did you get to work in the morning then?

I'd walk.

How long would that take you, do you think?

About twenty minutes.

00.05.34: Because there must have been people coming from all over?

Yes, there was women working there that was further afield.

00.05.46: How did they get to work then?

There was buses going then because when I got married and lived in Burry Port we were catching a bus up there then you see.

00.05.58: Did you know anybody else who was working there, before you started?

Yes, my cousin was working there.

So there was a familiar face there already.

Yes.

Because there must have been lots of people working there.

There was a lot on Shop 3 floor.

00.06.16: Was it mainly women?

Mainly.. Women were doing the radiators, men then were bringing the tubes and gills to us, and there was a lot of men in the dipping.

So was it a noisy place to work?

It was quite noisy.

So could you wear anything on your ears?

No. Nobody gave us anything for our ears or anything.

Was it too noisy to talk?

Well, we didn't talk until we had our break because we were so busy. We didn't stop to talk.

00.06.53: Would you have been allowed to talk?

Well, I expect so. Nobody said, 'you can't talk', you know. It's just that I wanted to get on with doing my work.

00.07.03: You couldn't do both?

No.

00.07.14: So what were your first impressions of the factory? You know, you had just come from school hadn't you to this place of work.

When I went in and started I didn't know anybody that was sitting next to me you know. I didn't know anybody directly. But you get used to them and you do talk to them, you know, and you get used to the people working around you, you know.

00.07.43: And did you have breaks?

Yes. We had a morning break, then, when I started there first of all we were having an hour for dinner. But then, and finishing at five. But then it came out then that they were cutting us down half an hour for the dinner time and you finish half an hour, half past four in the evening you see.

Why were they doing that then?

Because they thought, I suppose, that an hour was too long for dinner or something and they thought cut back in the afternoon to the half hour, and have half an hour for dinner.

Did that suit you?

It suited me better because we were finishing earlier in the nights, and although we weren't going up to the canteen, half an hour wasn't a lot. By the time you queue for the food, so a lot were taking packed lunches in for that half hour.

00.08.36: So what would you do then? Would you take a packed lunch or would you have lunch there?

In the beginning I was having dinner there. But then I started taking a packed lunch in because Shop 3 was the other side, right on the bottom. By the time you walked up and walked back your dinner time was nearly over you know. So we just used to sit around and have a packed lunch.

00.09.00: Did you take your overalls off to eat then or did you stay as you were?

No, we stayed as we were.

There wasn't much time to do much.

No.

00.09.11: So would you say you enjoyed the work?

Yes, I enjoyed it. And then in the evenings we went there, instead of doing piece work we were on an hourly rate then. You had to do a score in an hour.

00.09.28: Was that more difficult or more easy?

More easy.

00.09.35: Was there something you didn't enjoy about the work?

No. I can't say. There wasn't anything that I didn't enjoy. I never thought of it. I just went and done my work and got paid at the end of the week. And that was great.

So what would you do in the evenings because you would start quite early and you'd be home say five or half past five. What would you do in the evenings then? Would you be too tired to go out or would you have work to do with your mother at home?

Well, when I started at home, I had, I was with my mother. So of course my mother done all the work. So I didn't do anything. She'd have all my food on the table and things so there was nothing really to do in the evenings. And we never went out in the evenings. You know, we'd started courting, perhaps our boyfriends would come up and see us or perhaps we'd go to the cinema once a week or something. Or I'd go down to his house. But we never went out, you know as they are today, clubbing and all that you know. That wasn't you know.

00.10.36: And how did your parents feel that you'd started working, because it was helping them too was it?

Well yes. I think they wanted us to work and earn money. Because at sixteen we were courting and we wanted to get married and things. So it helped didn't it.

00.11.00: So you said it was men and women working there. It wasn't mainly women.

There was men working there. *It was mainly women.* Mainly women. But as I said the men were bringing us, and the maintenance on the jigs the men had to see to, because, and there was men in the dipping. But doing the radiators, building them it was women. Men wouldn't do that you see. It was women doing that.

00.11.30: What was the actual product that they made at Morris Motors?

It was the radiators.

Radiators, car radiators. *Car and lorries.* Yeah, radiators. Some were on big jigs like that you know. Really huge.

How many people would you say worked there at that time? Hundreds?

Hundreds, hundreds.

00.11.55: And did that change during the time that you were there?

No that was the same, I know you know every jig was taken. *There were hundreds in our Shop alone.* Hundreds, and hundreds.

So were there skilled jobs there, and unskilled jobs. You said you were given training when you got there, somebody showed you what to do.

Somebody didn't actually show us, they just said here are the gills you just put them into these slots, and you turn it round tubes, and then we were left to it then. It wasn't such training as such in those days.

00.12.41: But you must have got quicker then as time went on?

Yes, I was fanning them, a load of gills like that, and I'd fan them and I'd slot them into the machine like that, so that they were all in. I didn't go one at a time like that. You just get a pile like that, put them together, fan them like that, and go through them like that. And you'd finish it, turn it round and just put the tubes in.

So piece work suited you did it?

Well, it suited me then because that's what it was, so the more I done, the more money I'd get, isn't it, on piece work you see. But then in the evenings when you were doing a score, once you've done you're score, you finish then you see.

00.13.26: You weren't offered any training there, because I think weren't there some apprenticeships and stuff there then?

Not for girls. No, not for girls. *The only apprentices were in the tool room for boys.*

So they'd get an apprenticeship from school?

Girls wouldn't have it. It was just, and you didn't have exams to pass or nothing like you know. You'd just go in and just get on with it.

00.13.51: Was there a possibility of changing job while you were there?

I did go on to, in the evenings, on inspection. No it was in the day, on inspection on the bubble cars, this tiny little cars like this in Shop 3. And I was on inspection there. I was at the end.

Was that because you were on evenings instead of days?

No, I was on that on the days before I finished, before I had Mark I was on the, and then of course I was on pack construction and the jigs then in the evening.

00.14.25: You said there were lots of women working there. Were most of them single women or married women?

It was a bit of both. Married, single.

So when women got married, did they tend to stay on?

Yes, they didn't finish or nothing. *We couldn't stay on once we'd had a baby. The only time we came back was ...* When they were married, they could stay on if they were married.

They work there if they were married, but not you couldn't stay there if you were pregnant.
No, that's what I'm saying, but married. You didn't have to finish because you were married. You still worked there but then once you had a baby you had to finish at six and a half months. And then re-apply for your job back.

00.15.06: So what would happen for example if you got pregnant?

You had to finish.

But you could work for a while?

You had six and a half months.

So what would happen when the six and a half months came?

They'd finish you off then. And they'd bring you your notice if you hadn't finish you see.

00.15.23: Did that happen to you?

Well, they came down. Because I was on sick on my third boy, the Personnel Officer came down, with my notice to finish.

And how did you feel then?

Miserable, because I wanted to go back, but they weren't keeping your jobs open you see.

So it was tough luck. It's quite hard then isn't it. It's very different from what happens today.

You had to accept it and that was that. We couldn't do anything about it.

But you'd lose all your income then, wouldn't you?

Yes, but once they were a year old, the boys, I went back. *There was no maternity money then.* No, nothing then you see. *And that was the end. Nothing.*

00.16.13: So when that happened then, you thought 'right I'm having the baby now'. In the back of your mind did you think, oh I will try and go back later on.

Well, not for that while, but once they were a year old I thought then, oh I've got to go back, you know, to have the money.

00.16.28: But was there work available then for you to go back?

Yes, I did go back straight away afterwards.

And did you have to go through an interview then, or they knew you already.

She knew me already so I had to go and see the Personnel Officer. But she knew me. So I started straight away, you know.

But was that awkward with having little children and working, because there were no creches in those days?

We managed because as I say I went back in the evening, when my husband came home. Because I had nobody in the day you see. So it was just like evening work, five till nine, four hours in the evening.

It's a long day isn't it, when you've been looking after children?

You've got to, otherwise, go without. You had to put up with it.

00.17.33: Do you remember having a pay rise there, or did your rates of pay change then?

Every birthday, you'd have a rise.

Automatically is it.

Yeah, automatically. You'd have a pay rise, and then when you were eighteen for a woman, you had the full rate, but twenty one for a man. But the man always had more than the woman, doing the same. Say I was on Inspection, and a man, and perhaps I'd be doing more on Inspection than him. He'd go off, and not do as much work as me. Yet, he was having double the pay I was having.

00.18.08: How did you feel about that then?

Well, we didn't think anything more. That's how it was, the men always had the best, better.

But everybody knew that?

Yes, everybody knew it so we just accepted it. Today, they wouldn't. They'd say equal pay today wouldn't they.

They would. Because that changed. I can't remember the year it changed now, in the Sixties or Seventies. But you didn't feel angry that he was getting more than you.

No.

00.18.39: So when you first started working and earning money, what did you spend your money on?

Where as I said, I had to give my mother, and for the rent and things, and food, and clothes, and try and save a little bit. What little money it was, it was alot in those days, you know.

What were you saving for?

Well, to get married and things, and get a house and things you know.

Were there any perks in the factory. I've spoken to some people who've worked in different types of factories, where perhaps they could get a discount, but working in a car factory.

What they were doing, you could have a car. And you could have a discount off a brand new car. A Mini or something. We never had it but people were buying new cars and they'd have a discount off it, off a car because of working there.

00.19.38: Were there any unions in the factory?

Yes.

Which union was it?

And a shop steward. *Transport and General Workers*. Yeah, Transport and General Workers.

00.19.49: Were you a member?

Yes.

Did you have to be a member? You know, could you choose whether you wanted to be a member or not?

I think in those days, everybody was a member you know, because there were so many strikes. The Union would say, 'right, out on strike', you know.

What would they strike about then?

More pay rise, or something like that, or the work conditions or something.

00.20.16: Did you feel that the pay was fair at the time?

Well, I felt it was fair at the time because Morris Motors was the bigger pay then, you know, than anywhere else, than a shop or something you see. So we didn't think anything more, we thought great, we're having this money. It was good.

What about the conditions then, what did you feel about the conditions?

Well the conditions there, it was cold in the winter because there was no central heating. But we'd have like coal fires, in the middle of the thing, and we'd be sitting round there warming ourselves.

00.20.47: What about the lighting, was it light or dark?

No. The lighting, I think was alright wasn't it. It was quite bright. We could see what we were doing.

00.20.58: We talked about strikes now, did you feel generally that the workers, or that you were treated fairly.

Well, sometimes I feel when the Union always sticks up for management.

Do you think so?

Yeah. And not with the workers. That's how I felt. Perhaps everybody else don't feel like that.

Because they were supposed to be representing you weren't they, and you were paying them.

Yes. You see.

So how did you get on with the Union for example.

It wasn't so much the Union, it was the shop steward, but I won't get into that.

00.21.43: Did you ever see the bosses then?

Yes, they'd come round, and they'd watch me working.

Did that make you feel nervous?

No, because I was very good at my job.

So you must have made a good impression then?

I did. They were five there standing around me.

Did they speak? Did they ask you about your work?

No, they just stood and watched me doing it, and then they just sort of left, and didn't speak directly to me, you know.

Were they in suits?

Yes.

00.22.22: Do you know of somebody, you know you said you were good at the work, do you know of somebody who couldn't manage it. Not everybody's practical are they?

There was one, but I won't get in to that.

00.22.42: Was the work dangerous in any way?

Well, there was acid there. And it can be quite dangerous you know. We had to wear rubber gloves. And I think it was the acid on them. And if that got into a cut or something, it could be quite septic.

00.22.59: Did that happen to you ever?

Yes, I've had small little cuts, where it's gone septic with me. You know I've had to keep on changing my gloves, because once you got a hole in that glove, or a slit, it'll leak in see.

Did they warn you against that then, because you know these days, everything is health and safety isn't it?

It wasn't in those days about health and safety you know.

So you were looking after yourself really.

Yes, they didn't tell you very much. You just got on with the job.

00.23.30: Do you remember any injuries or accidents happening in work?

Yes. I don't know if I should say about them. *Well, you don't have to mention names.* There was one young boy, he had his hand in the machine, and had his finger off right behind me. And then there was another one that slipped on wet floor and cut herself on the radiators, and things you know. There was accidents happened there.

00.24.00: Were they compensated then, when that happened?

I don't know. I didn't really ask them. *I never heard of any compensation.*

Because they must have had time off work.

Yeah.

Because it was a car factory, and you know, you were dealing with acid, were there lots of rules and regulations?

Nobody told us anything.

We talked about breaks earlier, what about people who wanted to go and smoke for example? If they wanted to have a break, or a toilet break, was somebody watching over?

No. They'd just go to the toilet to have a cigarette or in our break times they'd have a cigarette because it wasn't then that you couldn't smoke in public, so they was smoking where you are like, you know? There was nothing.

Did you smoke?

I never smoked.

00.25.08: You were saying it was cold in the factory, did you have any extra clothing to combat the cold?

Yes, we had to put on perhaps a coat or thicker clothes, on.

They didn't give you that.

No. No, we wore our own.

00.25.22: And generally, what were the facilities like? There was a canteen, and was there somewhere to change?

There was a big canteen there, by Shop 1, further down than ours.

Did you have somewhere to change your clothes, like changing rooms?

No.

00.25.41: And was the factory quite clean?

Yes, it wasn't dirty or anything. It was quite clean.

00.25.53: I've got a question here, did you play music while you were working. It was noisy where you were working wasn't it?

Yes. There was no music, was there? *Yes. At eleven o'clock we had Workers' Choice. I don't remember that.*

What was it, on the radio?

It came on a loud speaker, radio. It came on at eleven, till twelve, and two till three in the afternoon.

So what was it? Music?

Music. All the pop songs of the time. I don't remember that.

So were you all singing together?

Not everybody singing together.

Can you remember any of the songs? I'm not going to ask you to sing. I was just wondering, can you remember any of the song?

Yes, I can remember one, and everybody was singing together. 'Listen to the rhythm of the falling rain'.

So you were allowed to chat but you didn't get much opportunity.

No, well we were busy, we were all busy so you know we wanted to get on with our work.

So when would you have a chance for a chat?

When we had our break.

So what would you talk about then?

General knowledge, everything I suppose.

00.27.08: Do you think that people suffered any long term effects from working in the factory?

No, I don't think so. I don't know anybody.

One woman I spoke to worked in Tick Tock, in the watch factory. She thought that her eyes might have been affected because they had an eyepiece like this, and she'd be looking through that all day. But I suppose it's difficult to tell.

Impossible. The only thing that might not have, might not have been aware of now..Is the conveyor belt with the gills I think. No, is the noise perhaps. It could have affected some people's hearing, later in life. I don't know. Or the conveyor belt going, because I worked you know, in the ice cream factory, and there was a conveyor going there. And in the end I was started going, falling all over the place. And I was only supposed to have been there ten minutes, when I was there for half an hour. And they didn't tell me. I said 'I'm not feeling right in my head'. And they said, 'how long have you been on it?' I said nearly half an hour. 'Well you're only supposed to be on it ten minutes'. And they never told me that and the conveyor was like this. Well, it was making my ...

00.28.16: Where was that then?

In the ice cream factory down in Pembrey.

00.28.24: And how did the men and the women get on do you think?

I think they got on well.

Was there much leg pulling and joking?

Lots.

00.28.35: So who would be pulling whose leg?

I don't know. *Boys pulling the girls legs.*

You were saying you started when you were fifteen, if somebody young started there, would they get teased?

Yes, yes.

So what type of thing would happen?

I can't remember. It was so long ago, now. *They'd tease about lots of things.*

00.29.00: When you were working first of all, then you got married then while you were working there? So how did your husband feel about you working, was he happy.

He was happy about it.

00.29.14: And what about when you got home then, you'd have all the housework to do, would he help?

Well my husband didn't. He believed the women, he was old fashioned, women should be in the house. But I said, 'what am I going out to work for' I used to tell him you know. If that's the case isn't it.

00.29.37: So how many hours, how many days a week did you work?

Well, we worked five days and sometimes we worked a Saturday morning for overtime.

But if you didn't want to work the Saturday...

You didn't have to. But we did to have the extra money.

Was it extra, was it like time and a half or something?

Time and a half for a Saturday see.

And you worked the dayshift while you were there first of all?

Eleven years on days. *If they were extremely busy you'd work on until six in the nights as well. Two hours overtime.*

00.30.14: But did you have to or could you say, 'I've got to go'.

No, you didn't have to. No you didn't have to do it.

And were you clocking in when you got there?

Yes.

So what would happen when you got there first in the morning?

Well, I'd always be there half an hour before , but there was no lights on, but I was always half, I'd always be there by seven.

You're an early bird.

I'm terrible.

I wish I was like you.

I'd be sitting down waiting for everyone else to come because I'd be in the dark, sitting there.

00.30.45: You were never late then were you?

I'd never be late, even now I won't be late?

I wish I was like that. Were you aware that other people might turn up late?

Yes.

So what would happen to them then?

Well, I think they allowed three minutes. You'd get quarter of an hour then, taken off your pay. They allowed you three minutes, if you're later than that you'd have taken off quarter of an hour. *And if it was regular you'd get a warning about timekeeping.*

I suppose it's the same people who tend to be late all the time isn't it?

Some people are late, some people are early like me who can't help it. But I don't think anybody was there like me, as early as me.

You should have asked for extra money. We were talking about the canteen earlier, and they did meals and stuff, did the people who had a meal have to pay?

Yes.

There was nothing free there?

No, you had to pay for it.

What about tea and stuff in the morning, did you get a cup of tea from them for nothing?

No. We had to bring our own, if you wanted tea for your break or whatever. *They did bring a tea urn down, and toast on a trolley at nine o'clock. We had a ten minute break at nine o'clock and they'd bring a trolley with toast. I never had it. With toast and an urn of tea, but you had to pay for it. But we always took our own.*

And what about holidays then. How many days holiday a year did you have?

We had two weeks in July, the last two weeks in July.

It was shut down then was it?

Shut down.

And you got paid for those two weeks?

Yes.

00.32.32: What about Bank Holidays then?

We'd have the Bank Holidays off as well because the factory wasn't open.

00.32.43: Did people socialise a lot outside work?

The young unmarried girls. Some did but we didn't, you know, socialise outside.

00.32.58: Was there a club or something?

There is a Morris Motors Club. But I have been once or twice with my husband, when I was working there, and I won the bingo.

00.32.20: Did they organize something like a Christmas do for you?

No.

Did you organize one for yourselves?

No. *They organized a Christmas party for the children of the married men and women.*

00.33.36: And where would that be then?

In the Morris Motors Club isn't it. In the canteen.

00.33.42: Would they give them a present?

Yes.

And was Santa present?

Yes.

And what did the children think of that then?

You know what kids are like, they like a party don't they, and a present and they think it's wonderful.

00.34.02: So there was a Social Club there was there, but you didn't really .
I didn't really go to it.

00.34.12: So, to sum up then would you say that you enjoyed working there?
Yes, yes.

And you didn't mind if you were doing the same thing quite a lot then?
No, no.

You didn't mind. What about the social side of the factory? You said you weren't really free to go out and stuff in the evening with people from work, but during the working hours, you could socialise, you know you had a social life in work.
In work. Yes, yes. We used to socialise with them when there was breaktime or having our lunch. We'd all sit around, having it together and chatting.

So that was your social life in a way.
Yes.

Because that changed, obviously when you had a baby then, didn't it?
It was evening then I went back then because that's the only time I could go.

But during the time you were at home with the baby did you miss the girls?
No, I didn't think about really.

00.35.17: I'm just going to ask you again about you leaving. How long were you there for the first time, before you left?
Eleven years on days.

So why did you leave?
Because I was pregnant.

And how did you feel about leaving then?
I was alright, because I was thinking looking forward to the baby and things, and having the baby, because I'd been married for nearly seven years so that was, I was thrilled about that.

00.35.50: Did you have a party, or was there a collection or something for you when you left?
No.

00.36.00: And how long were you at home then before you went back to work?
Mark was a year when I went back.

But you had to re-apply?
I had to re-apply for the job.

Did you feel ready to go back then?
I didn't want to go because I always felt guilty leaving the children.

00.36.18: Are you still in contact with people who you worked with back then?

Only one that I send a Christmas card to that I was very friendly with when I was there so we send Christmas cards to each other every Christmas.

Thank you very much.