

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Laura Ashely, Carno (1963 - 1978)
(also Cardwells in Machylleth and Jonro in Denbigh)

Interviewee: VN002 Morfydd (Mo) Lewis
Date: 20: 11: 2013
Interviewer: Kate Sullivan on behalf of Women's Archive Wales

00:07 OK, *Mo*, can you tell me first of all your name and date of birth?

Morfydd Lewis. 26-5-47.

Lovely. Can you tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, your mother and father, siblings?

No. Too complicated.

Too complicated? But you were born in Carno?

No.

No?

(Interviewee explains it is too complicated as she was one of seven children and after her mother died, when she was a baby, she went to live with an aunt while her father, an industry worker, raised her six siblings on his own)

00:45 OK *then, Mo*, can you tell me where you were born and where you went to school?

I was born in Machynlleth but I've been brought up by an aunt in Carno. So I went to school in Carno and then went to Newtown High School.

OK, *so your primary education was in Carno and then your secondary in Newtown?*

In Newtown.

01:11 *So how old were you when you left school?*

Fifteen.

Why did you leave? Did you have any option?

We all left at fifteen, most of us then. Then I went back to Machynlleth because I had two sisters working in the sewing factory in Machynlleth.

So did you go back to live with them?

For twelve months.

Right, and did you start work then in Machynlleth?

Yes.

So, where was that?

In Cardwells, sewing for Marks and Spencers.

And that was your first job on leaving school?

Yes, first job.

Did you have any training, then, to go into that factory?

No, no. Just because there was two sisters there.

01:52 *They got you the job?*

Yes.

Did they train you?

Yes, yes, you had a room of trainees there.

Right. Was it difficult?

Yes, yes, yes.

*What was the most difficult thing, then, for you as a young girl just leaving school?
What was the most difficult thing about going into the workplace?*

Well, it wasn't too bad, knowing that you had somebody there, so that helped, and you did the same thing for about six weeks, which was put the bias binding around the piece, round the material, and you had to get that right before they put you on something else.

Did you pick that up pretty quickly?

Yes, yes, not too bad.

02:43

And did they put you on something else after that?

Yes, you go on another line then, I can't remember what we used to make then, you know.

But it was clothes for Marks and Spencers, was it?

Yes, yes, yes.

Was it a big factory?

Yes, it was. I think it must have been an old school, it's right by the railway station, I'm not sure if there's still a factory there, to tell you the truth.

And how long did you work there?

Twelve months.

Were they all women working there?

Mostly, yes, mostly.

Did you make friends there?

Yes, I did, I did.

So, did you like it?

Yes.

And why did you leave that factory?

Well, we had an offer of a job in Carno, with Laura Ashley, so, and there was a little bit more money.

What were you earning in the Machynlleth one, do you remember?

I think it was about £1.50 or something like that, and then I had four pound a week in Laura Ashleys. And there was only me and my sister there, two machinists.

In . . . ?

In Carno.

03:55

Right. You were the only two machinists?

Yes, yes, the first two.

So did you have to have an interview for the Carno job?

I think it was my sister, Rosina, had the interview, because she worked in their home

first, in the shop, well I think it's a shop, in Machynlleth, the flat outside Laura Ashley. And she worked in the back rooms there for about four weeks, five weeks.

What was she doing?

Sewing, sewing tea towels, and oven gloves, and they were like fisherman's tops, that's all.

Right, so she heard about the job then because she was working . . .

Well it was, the ones that I was brought up with in Carno, it was them that heard that Laura Ashley was coming there. And he went there and said 'Oh, I've got somebody that can sew', because Carno wasn't a sewing place, there wasn't anybody in Carno, so that's how we got the job.

So why did they pick Carno, do you think?

Um, cheap labour I should think.

05:15 *So did you move to Carno then?*

Yes, yes, we moved, and my sister came along as well.

So where did you live in Carno?

Where I'd been brought up, with them.

Right, so you moved back to Carno, really?

Yes, we did, we did.

So in Carno were you happy to leave Machynlleth?

Oh, yes, to go back., yes

Because of the move to a different job or a different place?

No, just going back to where I'd been brought up, yes.

So what did you do initially in Carno, because you were there quite a long time, were you?

Well, we did nearly everything there, they used to have, they used to print, it was only tea-towels then, tea-towels, and they used to print the tea-towels, they'd be in huge rolls, then we'd be cutting them, just with a scissors, a big scissors, we'd cut them, sew down the sides, then you'd have to pack them and they'd go to the post office then.

Right, only tea-towels at that time?

Tea-towels.

06:26

Do you remember what year that was, roughly?

Sixty, would it be sixty-three, sixty-four, something around there.

So how many tea-towels did you have to produce a day?

Thousands.

Thousands?

Yes. It was nearly the same as what we were used to, were trained for, you know, the bias binding, you'd be putting it through like a little bias binding thing, and just do one side, had to sew them, cut them all then do the other side.

So did you enjoy the work?

Yes, yes. It was just like an old shed, there was nothing there, nothing there at all.

Did they bring in facilities for you, proper worktops, heating, stuff like that?

No, no.

Describe the room for me.

Partitioned. Huge. It was a huge, a huge working club which had lost their licence, and it was just partitioned off, The main place would be where the printers were, then they'd partition it off and the machinists would be in here, another partition for the office, like two telephones, another partition where they used to do the prints, like photography and things like that, printing, you know.

But it was part of the same factory, was it?

Huge, just one room was split into about three sections.

08:19

So they provided you with your own sewing machine?

Well, we had big sewing machines, industrial ones, oh yes, we did have sewing machines, and an over-locker, we had one of them.

Right, and an over-locker is . . . ?

That does the finishing. But then you didn't want that for the tea-towels. The over-locker came a bit later when they started doing dresses, and things like that.

OK, so were you doing tea-towels for a long time before the dresses came in?

Yes, and oven gloves, and these fishermen, with pockets in the front, they were like garden . . .

Like smocks?

Like smocks, yes,

So did they have heating and light?

Oh, lights, yes, there was lights, but I can't remember much of heating there.

09:18

Did you have to wear a uniform?

No, no, but then later on, when they started making these smocks, everybody'd be wearing them.

Really?

Yes, you'd be wearing them for work, like, isn't it.

Did they give them to you or did you have to buy them?

No, I'm sure we used to . . . I'm sure they used to give them to us, I can't remember to tell you the truth. I'm sure it used to be, like, seconds material or something, yes.

Did you have to clock in and out every day?

Not then, not then, until we moved to the bigger factory, by the old station yard, well I don't remember clocking in and out in the little one, no, well there was only two of us there!

So when you say there was only two, you mean right at the beginning?

Me and my sister.

You were the only two people sewing tea-towels?

Yes, and there was another lad that came from London with Bernard Ashley, and he was the manager there. Yes, there was just the two of us in this factory and Tony, Tony Shepherd his name was, and that was it.

10:33

So did more workers come before, or after, the move to the new building?

Before.

They did come before?

Yes, before. Well I wasn't there for long after, because I got, we got married, and um, but they brought a machine to the house for me.

Did they?

We only had a really small house and they brought a sewing machine to the house and they used to bring me work every week, pick-up work, and bring me work.

So did they keep you on part time then?

You were like, um, you were really self-employed really then. You know they'd give you, um, oh I don't know, was it £5 or something you'd get for whatever you were doing, I think the blouses and things had started to come in then, and then they'd bring you a sample and they were all cut ready for you, you know, all the cuffs would be cut, and all that, and then you'd just make them.

11:36

So did they do that because you were married . . .

Yes.

. . . and they didn't employ married women in the factory?

No, because I couldn't go to work because you didn't go to work then, but as soon as my son started school, she took me back, they were in the big factory then, and I worked nine till quarter to three, and, because she wouldn't have you working after that, you'd have to pick your children up from school.

So, when you say 'she' you mean Laura Ashley herself?

Yes.

Did she not want to employ married women then?

Oh, yes, yes.

But not in the factory?

Your place was with your children if you wanted to.

So you chose that, did you?

Yes, and then all the summer holiday, they'd bring you, your machine in work would be empty for six weeks and then they'd bring you like out-work, to do patchwork quilts, and you'd be putting them in squares, in bundles, and they'd be selling that. Oh, no, she was all for the mother.

Was she?

Yes, yes.

So did you meet her personally?

Yes, yes, oh I knew her well.

Did you?

Oh, yes, before the children, and everything.

So it was really a family business then, when you worked there?

Oh, yes.

And what were they like to work for?

Fantastic.

Were they?

Yes, yes. Well, like I say my sister worked there a lot longer than me, cos after I went, started with them, then did out-work with them, then went back in the factory, and then of course we moved up to north Wales. But my sister worked with them for a long long time.

13.33

So when you were working at home, did you work at home for the whole period your children were growing up?

Till Kevin went to school, which would be five.

Right, and then you went back?

Back to the factory, and that was still the same, nine till quarter to three. You made sure, you were clocking in and out then, but you made sure you picked your children up from school.

Did you find it difficult or easy combining the two?

Fine.

Did you?

Yes, yes. They were very very good to you if you had children.

Were there any additional benefits?

No.

What would happen if you or your child was ill? Would they be okay about giving you days off?

That would be alright, yes, they were very good, but you wouldn't get paid, like.

Right, so it was without pay?

Yes.

14.30

So you reckon you started on £4 a week, in Laura Ashley and that was in the 60s?

Yes.

Did you wages go up?

Yes.

How long did you work there all in all?

Fourteen years, fourteen, fifteen, something like that.

So why did you leave?

Because I moved up to Denbigh, North Wales.

Were you sorry to leave the factory?

Oh, yes, yes, but then I went straight into another sewing factory up here.

15.27 *In Laura Ashley, did they have a union?*

No!

No? Why not?

No, he was against it. He didn't want the union in.

Right. Did the workers want the union?

No, not in them days, no, no. I think perhaps the union would have been in later on but not when I was there. And we never thought about it, to tell you the truth. No, nobody did.

So as time went on, how many women were you working with in Laura Ashley, in the big factory?

Hundreds.

Hundreds?

Yes.

How did you find the change, from working just with your sister, originally, to working with so many people? Did you find it strange?

No, no, it was, cos you know them all, from the village and from the next village, things like that, and they were very good, you know, they had all their own transport, to pick the women up and everything.

So they laid on a bus?

Yes, buses and mini-buses, to come from the villages, they were very good, you know.

How did you get to work?

I walked, I only worked down the road, ha ha.

16.50 *And did you have breaks throughout the day?*

Yes, yes, yes, you had your tea breaks and everything, but a lot different in the little place to the big place, there was a canteen in the big place, there wasn't in the other one.

What did you do in the little place?

Oh, it was just a kettle and a toaster, that's it.

Did they provide the tea?

Yes, they did, and where it was, I mean you wouldn't have it today, you'd have, like, the toilets were there and when you came out to wash your hands, the table would be there with the kettle and the toaster, ha, ha, you wouldn't have that today with health and safety, but we never thought nothing of it, you just didn't. And everybody did their bit. It would be perhaps my turn today to put the kettle on and do that, and then the same, in the beginning I think we used to clean it, on a Friday you'd do the cleaning as well.

Really?

Eventually they got a cleaner in, you know, eventually, but you just did it.

Did they pay you extra for doing the cleaning?

No, that was in your, honestly, you just got on with it, you were so glad to have a job. We never thought nothing of it, I don't think, no.

18:14

What did you do about lunch?

Well, you'd take your own in the little one. But when they moved to the big one, there was a proper canteen, she was a big believer in No Chips.

Oh right, what sort of food did she . . . ?

Fresh, everything fresh.

What sort of . .

She was really into that, yes.

She employed cooks to cook proper food?

Yes, yes, it was cooked, proper food, but I don't remember that, you know, I'd moved by then. Yes, a big canteen and everything there, but not what I was used to.

So what were the other changes from the little factory to the big one?

Well, they had mechanics and everything there then, it was massive you know, massive place.

More organized?

Yes, yes, but then you lose that, um . . .

Closeness?

Yes, you do, from doing everything, from cutting to sewing to packing, they've all got their own departments then, haven't they.

So in the little factory you were part of the whole process?

Yes.

As you say, from cutting to sewing . . .

Yes.

and then in the big factory, you had a specific?

Yes.

19:40

What did you do in the big factory?

In the sewing line, I used to do the samples, just two girls, another girl and we used to do the samples.

So what were the samples?

Well, the first, they'd come off, you know, if they designed a new dress the first one to come off the table, we'd have to try them out. Cos if that didn't fit that, you'd have to redo, alter it again before it would go on the shop floor and they'd be making hundreds of them.

So when you say you had to try it out, you mean you put the bits together?

Yes, yes, and then sometimes that wouldn't be right, so it would go back to the design table again, and they'd say 'well, we'd have to cut a little bit more off that', 'a little bit more off that', isn't it. And then perhaps sometimes it would take you a week, or more than a week, to get one right, yes, cos there'd be pin-tucks everywhere.

What did you think of the dresses? Did you like them?

Oh, yes, you'd go out on a Friday night, or something, and we'd all be dressed the same. You'd go to a wedding and they'd all be dressed the same.

Were you given the dresses at cost price?

Oh, yes, you could buy them really really cheap, really cheap.

So did you buy them as presents for your family and friends?

I think everybody in the family has tea-towels.

Really?

Yes, yes. But the first dress ever was two, it was a white, a white background with a black print, and it was like two tea-towels sewn together.

Was it?

Yes. There's a photograph there. It was, that was the first one they tried out and it was just shaped here, it was like a shift dress, but the print, instead of cutting it the size of a tea-towel they did it longer, and then they just shaped the neck, shaped the arms, and we just sewed it together.

Gosh, so did that go through to the shop floor then and then it was sold?

Yes, yes, yes. I remember that.

So did you think what you were doing, because Laura Ashley is quite iconic now, isn't it, did you think it was going to be so successful?

No, no, never, but she never changed, nor him.

Really?

No, no. They'd still know you, even after I left, I was still invited back to Christmas parties and things like that.

Were you? So they put on a Christmas party for you, did they, for the workers?

Not in the beginning, not when we were a little one, when it went a bit upmarket, yes.

22:45

And what were they like, the Christmas parties.

Oh, fantastic, really good.

They provided food and?

Yes, yes, everything.

And could the family go, as in could you take your husband?

Husband? Yes, yes, yes, we had some good parties.

Did they provide any sort of annual outing to anywhere?

No, I can't remember that, but a lot went on after I left, you know. I was really there when, in the very very beginning, really, and then it got bigger and bigger and bigger.

And did you feel it getting bigger and bigger?

Oh, yes, yes. But even when I go home now and we go into the local pub, you still see the same friends, and the same people.

23:44

So did you make friends in the factory that become friends outside the factory as well, or were you all friends anyway?

No, I knew them all anyway, cos you'd have mothers, fathers, grannies, nains, taids, everybody used to work there, you'd have about four or five from one generation there, yes, it was, fantastic.

So you socialized with the same people inside and out?

Yes, yes, I did, yes. I went to school with most of them, as we did, and we were very lucky, because he bought a piece of land in the middle of the village, and . .

Mr Ashley?

Mr Ashley, for the workers, they bought a plot off him, and there was one, two, three four . . six houses were built on it, they were all men, except for me, I was the only girl that had, we bought a plot, and we built our own house on there.

So he had land in the middle of the village?

He bought a piece of land for his workers to build houses.

So he sold you that piece of land.

Piece of land for peanuts.

For peanuts was it?

Yes, yes, but all the others were drivers and directors, they were all men working for him, and I was lucky enough to have one.

Right, so did you have to apply for that plot of land?

I really can't remember, I can't remember how it came about, it just, I think it was just for anybody that could buy the plots.

So how did you feel about being able to buy it?

Oh, really, really lucky, we were really lucky. But I think half of Carno were very lucky, yes, they'll tell you that, as well.

So you built your first house as a house of your own there?

Yes, yes, yes we built it in sections, we didn't live in it long, we had to sell it.

Oh, you sold it?

Yes, yes.

And when you did live in it, it was you yourself, your husband and your son?

Yes, and daughter, yes.

26: 23

So with your wages, did you find it easy making a living on Laura Ashley wages?

Well mine was just for the extras, wasn't it, my wages.

Was it? So your husband was the main earner?

Yes, he didn't work for Laura Ashley though. He could have but . . .

Chose not to?

Yes.

What did your husband do?

He was in finance.

In Carno?

In Newtown, and then he travelled, was a traveller, and then we moved up to Denbigh.

Was that for work?

Yes, with his job.

Right. So when you say your wages were extra, did they go into a 'pot', then, or did you keep a little bit back for yourself?

Oh, I've always had a little bit for myself, ha, ha. I have to have the little bit for myself, it's quite nice.

So what did you do in Carno when you weren't working, what was the social life, or was it more about home life?

No, we used to go, the men used to go out on a Friday and then us women, they used to take us out on a Saturday.

Did you? Where did you go?

A lot of us, we used to go up to Dinas Mawddwy.

Why?

Well, they used to have, like, country and western up there, and, um, Dolbro?? it was called then, and we used to have coaches going from the village and every month or so we used to go up there and we'd have a night out there. Otherwise, we'd just go the local, and of course you'd always have somebody playing the piano, wouldn't you, and then there'd be a singsong, and then you'd always go back to somebody's house, which was, but in them days we never had drinks in the house.

So you went back for cups of tea?

Cups of tea and that's it.

But you drank in the pub, presumably?

Yes, yes.

What did people drink in those days?

Port and lemon, I did. And rum and black the men used to drink. Port and lemon and gin and orange I think it was, ooh.

So did you have annual holidays off from the factory, a factory fortnight or something?

Yes, yes. They used to close, and Christmas time as well, they used to everything down.

How long over Christmas would they close?

Must be a week, I don't remember that.

And in the summer you had the factory fortnight I guess?

Yes, yes, was in June, July. August.

Did you actually go away or just spend the time at home? Did you have holidays?

Yes, we've had holidays, yes, yes.

Abroad?

No, no, not with the children.

Where would you go?

We used to go to Scotland a lot, we've got family in Scotland, so we still go up there quite a lot, and we've had quite a few caravan holidays.

Where would you go in the caravan ?

We'd go to Scotland as well then.

Touring? You'd take the caravan with you?

No, no, just static up there, you know.

Static, okay.

29:59

So in the factory, the new one, you were mainly women, or was there a mixture by then?

A mixture by then, yes, different sections.

So what were the different sexes doing? I mean, the women were sewing presumably, were they?

Yes, and the men would be cutting.

Oh, the men cut did they?

Yes, by then they had proper machines to cut, not like we used to cut with the scissors, you had proper cutters by then, big, big tables, huge tables, and then you'd roll it out, and that was by electric then as well, you didn't do it by hand.

Were the men and the women in one big room or would there be different ?

No, different sections, the cutters when I was there, there were rows and rows of girls sewing and then the cutters would be down the bottom. And then in another section further off you'd have the printers and then you'd have the other section where the dresses would be going out, and straight from the things into the lorries, and away they'd go.

So could you see into the different sections?

No, no.

So you weren't working in your section, then, with men?

Yes, the cutting tables were there, and then you've have the pressers and the checkers, and everything would be in that big room.

So did people talk to each other when they were working?

Oh, yes, yes.

Was it difficult to have a conversation . . . ?

But then, I think there was piece work there by then.

31.41 *What's 'piece work'?*

How many, you'd get paid extra for how many you would do in a day.

Right.

I was never into that.

Were some?

Oh yes. Some would never get off their seats all day.

They'd just sit there and . . . ?

Yes, yes, making money, ha, ha.

But would they talk at the same time?

Some of them wouldn't!

Really?

You'd come in in the morning and head down, and that would be it.

But you weren't?

No, no, I couldn't do that.

So you would chat with your, with the girls working around you?

Yes, I'd be doing the samples then, yes.

So what sort of things did you talk about at work?

Oh the radio'd be on all day, you'd have the radio on.

Music?

Yes, yes, all day. And you could talk like this cos you'd have another over there. But when I was in there in the beginning you used to do the whole garment, but later on I think it went, um, I'm not sure, I can't really remember, I think they used to just do, you'd be doing one part of it, and when I started, and even when I worked up here, you'd do the whole garment as well. I've never been one to do thousands of collars, thousands of cuffs, and that's all you do all day or all week.

Did you have to do a bit of that in Laura Ashley at one point though?

I didn't, I've never done it. I don't think I could do that, doing the same thing, day in day out.

33:35

So coming back to the men that worked in the factory, was there ever any banter, when they walked past, or whatever?

Oh, yes, yes, a good atmosphere.

Was it a good atmosphere?

Yes, yes, a good atmosphere.

Do you remember any arguments or anything between the workers ever, or falling out?

No, I suppose we did, I suppose you did, but nothing, no.

Nothing major? And what about health and safety, what about things like accidents?

Well, in the big factory, everything was up to date there. They used to have a nurse there as well.

Did they?

Yes, that's years after, isn't it, I suppose health and safety comes into it, then, doesn't it.

So in the early days, in the old factory and the beginning of the new, did you ever have, oh I don't know, needles going through your fingers and stuff?

Oh yes, yes.

Was it common that?

Yes, yes. They used to say that you're not a seamstress until you've had a needle through your finger. And they used to say, if it goes, leave it there, don't, cos you tend to pull, just leave your hand there.

Did that ever happen to you?

Oh yes, yes. It does hurt, ha, ha.

And did you leave your hand there?

Well, I can't remember to tell you the truth, it's years since I've had that happen.

But was there, you say there was like a nurse there?

Not in the first one.

Not in the first one, but if you did have an accident, what would happen in the first one?

First aid box and that was it, isn't it, because we were miles from the hospitals anyway in Carno. Newtown or Llanidloes was the nearest hospital.

35:33 *So did you have any sort of insurance? Nothing?*

Nothing.

And later on, in the big factory?

I can't remember.

Do you ever remember, maybe not yourself, but somebody having an accident, what the procedure would be?

I think they'd look after you.

Would they?

Yes, yes, they were very good, very very good, I can't say a bad word about them.

And you had sick pay, I guess, if you were off ill? Would they pay you?

Do you know what, I really can't remember, I can't remember that at all.

You were saying that on a Friday, Laura Ashley finished at twelve, the whole factory shut at twelve and everybody came out?

Yes, yes.

And then you went . . . ?

Well the buses would be there and all, isn't it, yes she was good like that.

So when you finished early on a Friday, did you come straight home or did you go shopping?

No, I'd go straight home. I couldn't drive then. I used to go home, cos Andy used to come home on a Friday sometimes, he'd go away on a Monday and back on a Friday.

So were your children home early on a Friday as well?

No, three o'clock from school.

So were you able to collect them then on a Friday?

Yes, yes, it was only walking, everything's a walking distance in the village.

So when you were working on the other days, you finished at five, did you?

No, I finished at three.

At three the whole time, once you'd had your children?

Yes, yes. Because they were still young when we moved up here. So I always did a nine till quarter to three, and most of the holidays off, always did that.

So before we finish with Laura Ashley, do you want to tell me about the football match?

Oh, ha, ha, ha. They did have a ladies team.

Did they?

Yes, we had a ladies team and I think somebody hadn't turned up one day and they put me in the goal, goalie, so I just went in and I think I let about ten in.

So where did they used to practice then?

On the local pitch in Carno, Carno football field.

So did you play, then, against neighbouring teams?

Yes, and perhaps a neighbouring factory, cos we had factories everywhere, they had factories in Machynlleth, Llanidloes, everywhere, Newtown, and it could have been against them.

So did they used to, say it was an away game, they used to take you on a bus?

Oh, I think yes, yes, I think people used to have cars by then as well. Cos they were desperate that day they asked me, ha, ha.

So you weren't in the team?

No, not really.

Didn't want to be, or . . . ?

No, ha, ha, oh dear.

So was there a men's team and a women's team separate?

No, there wasn't a men's team.

Just a women's team?

Yes.

So the girls that were in the team, they really liked it presumably?

Yes, yes. I don't think, they just did it, I'm not sure if they just did it for charity or something like that. That was a long time ago.

39:07

So when you moved up here, you moved for your husband's work, did you?

Yes,

And then you got a job pretty much straight away, did you, up here?

Yes, yes, it was another sewing factory, working with Welsh wool, tapestry work, which was very very popular then, as well.

And do you remember the name of the factory?

Yes, Jonro. Jonro Fashion.

And that was actually in Denbigh, was it?

In Denbigh, above a delicatessen shop, and you had to go up. That was a small place, I've always worked in really small factories, like not many people working, I think there were eight or nine machinists there as well, not many, and two pressers, and

that was the same, and a cutting room, and that was just the same.

How did you get that a job?

Just went for an interview and that was another one, I went for an interview in two places, one was a shirt factory that used to be here, but you had to work half past eight till five, and then Jonro let me work, again, start at nine and finish at three. So that's why I took that again.

How old were you when you started with Jonro?

Thirty, something like that, thirty one

So by that point, were you a skilled machinist then?

Oh, I never call myself skilled!

No? Experienced then?

Yes, I've learned, you learn, and I'm still learning, I think so. I learnt a lot from *that* factory.

Why was that?

Well, you had to have the matching, the skirts and the tapestry had to be exactly the same, I did learn a lot from them, yes.

Did you feel confident when you went from Laura Ashley to them because of your experience?

Yes, yes, yes.

Was it different to Laura Ashley?

Oh, yes, because Laura Ashley was cotton and this was wool, thick wool, wasn't it. You were working with a different material altogether.

So was that transition difficult?

Yes, it was, it was quite hard to work with that, and the skirts were all lined and everything, with a tapestry skirt, and all lining in the capes, the cloaks that they used to make, isn't it, tapestry, Welsh tapestry cloaks.

41:56

So do you remember what your interview was like, was it difficult because you'd come from a different material?

No, no, I think they must have given me a piece of material and gone on a sewing machine, you know, in the interview, and I think if you can control the machine, and things like that, that helps.

So the machines were the same basically, were they?

Yes, yes, the same.

What were the new people like to work for?

Still very nice, I've always liked all my bosses.

What about the new people you were working with?

Fine, yes.

Were they all women?

Yes, all women there, there wasn't any men at all.

Oh really?

No, no men at all, there were two lady bosses and about eight machinists, and there was a button holer, the girl that did the button holes did the over-locking, and then there was two pressers, that was it, and that was the same again, you had a cup of tea in the corner, ha, ha.

Was it? No canteen then was there?

No, no canteen, but it was in the town, cos you could go out lunchtime to get whatever you wanted.

And did you make friends easily in the new place?

Yes, still with some of them.

Was it a nice atmosphere?

Oh, yes, yes it was, I think the smaller the better.

And was there chatting and was there a radio like in Laura Ashley?

A radio, yes, but not too much chatting.

Why was that?

Because, she, the cutting where they cut, she had a window there, she'd tap, she'd be tapping that sometimes.

Really? To stop you talking?

Yes, yes.

Were they stricter than Laura Ashley then?

Not really, but if they wanted something out, you know, you've just to get on with it, haven't you, and then you'd start giggling then, don't you, you can't stop it, and you try to put your head down, yes, but they knew, cos she was talking about that when

we met at the reunion in the summer. And she said, we all said 'remember that window that you had, tapping at us?' And she was laughing.

So how long were you in the factory here, Jonros?

I don't remember, a few years.

And why did you leave?

I wasn't well. I was waiting to go in for an operation, and I just couldn't sit by a machine then for a while, so that was why.

I was going to ask about that because when you sit at a machine all day, it must be . . .

On your back, yes, the bottom of your back.

So you feel you've inherited this back problem with your work?

Yes, yes.

So when you left there, is that when you more or less retired from factory work was it?

No, no.

Okay, what did you do then?

Well I did for a while, I went into work in a nursing home, but I was sewing as well in a nursing home. I was sewing for the council in the old people's home, which I'm in there now but I haven't got many hours, and I used to work there nine till twelve sewing, and then I used to go into a care home from three till, or half past four, till seven, or something like that, in a care home, as well, so I've always worked. And then they offered me more hours in the care home, which I'm still doing today, is to look after the residents', clients' clothes, and I do the sewing, zips or whatever, and then I help, ironing or whatever wants doing. And me and another girl pick the colours for the bedrooms, and the curtains and the bedding and stuff like that. The boss calls me the housekeeper, make sure there's towels in the bathrooms and things like that. But in between that, I was sewing in Tweedmill Textiles as well.

And that's in Denbigh?

That's still going in Denbigh. I started off just going to help cut out one evening and I stayed there for a few years, so my days off, I was going there sewing or whatever they wanted me to do cutting there as well.

So you were working in the care home and part time in the textiles?

I was self employed in the textiles, so if I didn't want to go in I didn't have to.

You didn't have to.

No, I'm still friends with them, still go and see them.

You mentioned the reunion you had a few minutes ago . . .

That was with the other, that was with Jonro.

But is that an annual thing?

No, it was a one-off. There's a vintage shop in town and it was them, somebody had taken one of the capes in and they just put it in the free press 'Anybody worked in Jonro, get in touch with us, we're thinking of doing a reunion'. And we had afternoon tea in the chapel vestry up there.

So did all the girls go back for it?

A lot of them did, yes, there must have been about twenty of us there, we had a good chat, you know.

So have you kept in touch, cos you've obviously moved to a few different places, have you made friends and kept in touch with them?

Yes, yes, we were in wedding now with one of them. She got married for the first time, she was fifty-five.

And which factory was that?

That was from Jonro and she works in the factory in Corwen. And she did used to work in Cobanau. And, yes, we're still, I'm still in touch with her.

So when you look back on all these years you've worked in the factory, have you enjoyed it?

Oh, yes. Hard, really hard sometimes.

Why hard? What was the hard thing?

Oh, cold sometimes, your hands, my hands, I do suffer from my hands a lot now and I think it's from working, doing the same isn't it.

Repetitive?

Yes, yes, it does affect your hands. But I've always enjoyed it.

So what are your best memories?

Oh, different ones, isn't it.

Is it the camaraderie, or the actual work?

Yes, I do enjoy the work, I do, as long as there's no pressure on me, if I can go at my own, my own pace.

Has that been the case in most of the factories?

Yes, yes, I've never been on piece-work, ever, I couldn't do that, I couldn't do piece-work.

So do you have any bad memories from any of the factories?

No, no, not really, no, and I'm still sewing, I've still got sewing machines in the garage.

Have you? So when you started when you were sixteen, did you say?

Yes, well, fifteen really, and then I was fifteen, left school at fifteen, did my twelve months in Cardwells, and then with Laura Ashley.

So when you were saying, when you were younger, you were a bit afraid to speak back to your boss, did that change over your working life?

Only now, the latter years.

Is it?

Yes, yes.

So in Laura Ashley as well you were quite ..

Oh, yes, you would accept whatever they said.

Were you ever treated unfairly do you think?

No, never, never.

Do you think you would have spoken up if you had have been ?

I don't suppose I would have them days, no, I don't think I would have. No, you just get on with it, and accept it, and that's it, isn't it.

And what did you husband and your family think about you working? Were they happy that you worked?

Yes, yes.

They wouldn't have preferred you to be in the house?

No, no. We all worked then, cos I mean you were lucky to have a nine to quarter to three job, very very good.

If you could have afforded it, do you think you would have preferred to stay at home?

Yes, I think you would have. But there was nothing much to do in the village, you know.

In Carno, was that?

Yes, so it was quite nice to go out to work.

Right, and your children were at the local school, weren't they?

Local school, yes, yes. That's gone now.

OK, then Mo, thank you very much for that.

You're welcome. I don't know how much you can make out of it.

Mo then talked about the photographs (continuation of interview, VN002.1.2):

VN002.3 That's one of the first dresses, and it was like two tea-towels, but instead of cutting it into a tea-towel, they cut it longer, and then we just scooped the neck, it had the arm holes and we just sewed them, like a shift dress, it's a shift dress.

It's a mini dress though, is it?

Well, no it's not, it's knee length.

Oh, yes, knee length, yes. And that's you wearing it?

Yes.

So did they give you that or did you make it for yourself?

I can't remember, most likely made it for myself, more than likely.

Right. Do you remember how old you were in that photograph?

I wasn't married. I was, say seventeen, eighteen.

So you'd just started really in Laura Ashley?

Yes, yes, well I got married when I was nineteen, so that's in-between there somewhere.

And where is, where's that taken?

Oh, that's outside my mam and dad's house.

Is it? Was that near the factory?

Yes, not far, in the village.

VN002.4 That's outside the factory.

You're in this, are you?

No, no, I'm not in there. My sister's in there, Rosina.

That's the one on the right?

Yes.

Okay. And the other two?

Well, that's her sister-in-law now. And that's another girl that used to work there called Jennifer.

Right, and this is the old factory is it?

That's the old factory. It's still there, you know, standing, but it's a mess, but it's still there, like I said, it's an old club house that lost its licence. And we used to come in a door by here, and we used to sew here.

Right, behind those windows?

Yes, behind there.

So this is the back of the building is it?

That's the side.

So where are you looking out on?

The main road's here. Yes, it's right on the main road, when you're going through the village, it's half way through the village, and it's there.

VN002.5 *Okay, so whose car are you sat on there?*

That's Bernard Ashley's, ha, ha.

Did he know you used to sit on his sports car?

Ha, ha, I don't know.

Do you remember what sort of car it was?

It's a sports car it is, it's a lovely car.

Yes, it's a soft top, isn't it.

Yes, yes.

So do you know these two other girls still?

Yes, yes.

Are they in Carno still?

That one is, I'm not sure about that one now.

The one in the middle is, and that's your sister's . . . ?

Sister in law, yes. I don't know about . . . that's me there.

And you're on the right?

Yes, showing our legs.

Were you at the factory then?

Yes, sitting on the factory wall.

That's the factory wall is it?

Yes, yes, and the road is right behind us there. And the factory you were looking at there (in VN002.4) is up here, and we're sitting on the factory wall there.

So is this taken during a break?

Must have been, yes, or dinner break or something. Looks like we're happy, doesn't it?

It does.

And the nylon overalls.

That's what you're wearing there, isn't it?

Yes, yes, a nylon overall.

So who were these other people?

She was the secretary. Like I say, I think they've most of them have passed away now.

Do you remember their names?

Yes, yes. That's Jennifer, Ann and Glenys (Hughes? VN041). Yes, I remember them all. I used to, if I worked on a Saturday morning, I used to go to work with rollers and a headscarf ready for Saturday night.

And did they allow that?

Yes, a head full of rollers and a scarf round my head on a Saturday morning, yes.

It's a lovely photograph, isn't it.

Black and white. Yes, the rollers used to be on a Saturday morning to go to work.

So what else have you got there?

That's the same, you've seen that.

VN002.6 *So this is, that's you again, is it?*

Yes, yes.

And whose car is that?

Oh, I can't remember whose car that is.

VN002.11 *And what's this?*

That's when they won the Queen's Award for growth of exports, and they gave us something, I can't remember what we had. They gave all the staff, I can't remember whether we had money or what.

So this is an invitation is it, to that, um, was it a celebration?

No, we had something with this. I can't remember was it money, or what, and that was with it. And when was that? Nineteen seventy-seven.

And what's this?

Oh, that's nothing, I don't think, that's just our Ruby anniversary.

VN002.8 He lives in Carno and worked for Laura Ashley, John Griffiths (left), they were in the back there, all together, and that's, um, he's passed away now as well, and there's my sister again there (centre).

Okay, and this is outside the factory again?

That's outside the factory again. Yes, like I say, he used to do the printing, after when he came in, and he used to do a lot, we still see him quite often.

What's his name again?

John Griffiths. Yes, and he's got a beautiful house, they've all got beautiful houses, all who worked for Laura Ashley.

Did he have one on the plot?

No, no. *He* did (Mo indicated the man on the right).

What's his name?

Oh, he's passed away now, he was one of the directors, Meirion Rowlands (brother to Gwlithyn Rowlands, VN013). He came from working on a farm and shearing, and his mam and his sister used to work there, and they were desperate in the factory one day and he said to Bernard Ashley 'Well, I don't know nothing about sewing material', he said 'You shear sheep, don't you?' Yes, well you can use a scissors.' So that's how he got in, and he was a director in the end, he worked his way up.

He took to it then?

Yes, yes, he was brilliant.

So did the farm go under or . . . ?

No he was a work farm hand. So he said 'You can use shearer's scissors, you can use a scissors,' so that's how Meirion came in there, the whole family, whole family, from granddads to everybody, everybody got on. We were fine, but I mean, I only worked there, really, and I didn't work in the big factory for long. But it was like family there.

Everybody looks very happy in the photographs.

Yes, yes, and, I mean, when he passed away, you know, they -

Which one?

Bernard Ashley. Jane, the daughter, they'd asked John could he contact a few of the old ones, you know, and we were quite near the front. And they invited all back to Rhayader after, to the house. So they never forgot, never forgot you. . . . And that's one of their perfumes, an old one.

VN002.11 *Laura Ashley perfume?*

Yes. Horrible.

Is it?

VN002.13 Yes. But it's old, that one. And I've got, they came to our wedding as well, and they've written in here somewhere. . . I can't remember where they've signed it now, 'Bernard and Laura Ashley.'