

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Laura Ashley, Carno (1964-2003) a Laura Ashley, Y Drenewydd (2003-11)

Cyfwelai: VN013 Gwlithyn Rowlands

Dyddiad: 05: 02: 2014

Cyfwelydd: Kate Sullivan ar ran Archif Menywod Cymru

There is an English summary of the interview following the Welsh text

Cadarnhaodd Gwlithyn ei henw, ei chyfeiriad a'i dyddiad geni, sef 23/05/1947.

Ganwyd hi yng Nghaersws, roedd ei mam ym wraig tŷ a'i thad yn gweithio ar fferm. Ar ôl iddo ymdeol o'r fferm, o achos arthritis, aeth i lanhau yn ffatri Laura Ashley yng Ngharno. **Yn nes ymlaen, roedd ei mam yn smwddio i Laura Ashley hefyd, yn rhan amser. Roedd gan Gwlithyn 3 chwaer a 4 brawd, ac roedden nhw i gyd, heblaw 1 brawd, yn gweithio yn Laura Ashley. Roedd un brawd, Meirion, yn cneifio ar y fferm a gofynnodd Bernard Ashley iddo ddod i dorri deunydd yn y ffatri, a daeth Meirion yn Managing Director y cwmni yn y diwedd.**

Aeth Gwlithyn i ysgol Carno ac wedyn ar y trêen i ysgol uwchradd yn y Drenewydd, o ysgol Gymraeg i ysgol Saesneg. Roedd hi'n ffeindio hyn yn anodd iawn. Gadawodd hi'r ysgol pan oedd hi'n bymtheg oed. **'Dim ots be oeddech chi'n wneud, oeddech chi'n gorfod cael job.'** Cafodd hi swydd mewn siop yn y Drenewydd, ac wedyn mewn ffatri yn y Drenewydd, ond doedd hi ddim yn hoffi hynny, gan ei bod hi'n gwneud *'parts'* i geir, gwaith brwnt iawn.

Aeth hi yn ôl i waith siop ac wedyn, pan ddaeth Laura Ashley i Garno, aeth hi i weithio yn y swyddfa, yn helpu gwneud y cyflogau. Yn 1964 yr oedd hynny. Gadawodd hi yn 1966 i gael ei mab, heb briodi, ac wedyn aeth hi fel *'out worker'* i Laura Ashley. Doedd hi erioed wedi gwnïo cyn hynny ond meddyliodd ei bod am *'give it a go'* i ennill pres ond **'on i'n quite enjoio fo'**. Daeth y ffatri â'r peiriant i'r tŷ iddi, ac wedyn roedden nhw'n dod â bagiau o ddeunydd ac yn eu casglu nhw mewn ychydig o ddyddiau. **Roedd Gwlithyn yn gwneud yr 'outwork' hwn tan w'r mab fynd i'r ysgol yn 1970-1, ac wedyn aeth i i mewn i'r ffatri 9am-3pm. Roedd Laura Ashley yn mynnu bod y mamau a oedd yn gweithio iddi yn gallu mynd â'u plant i'r ysgol a'u casglu nhw yn y pnawn.** Yn nes ymlaen, pan oedd ei mab yn hŷn, aeth hi i weithio o 8am tan 5pm.

Pan ddechreuodd Gwlithyn yn 1964, fel clerch, dim ond 4 peiriannwr oedd yno, a dau ddyn yn gwneud y printio, meddai. **Chafodd hi ddim cyfweliad, jyst deud wrth Laura Ashley ei bod hi**

allan o waith, a dywedodd Laura "dewch i mewn, wnawn ni ffeindio job i chi." Doedd hi ddim yn eu nabod nhw yn bersonol ond roedd ei mam yn gofalu am ferch fach Laura, gan eu bod nhw'n byw reit gyferbyn y ffatri wreiddiol. Ateb y ffôn, gwneud cyflogau, gwneud paneidiau o de oedd ei gwaith, am gyflog o **'bedair punt rhywbeth,'** dyna oedd ei chyflog cyntaf yn y swyddfa

9:00 Cafodd hi ei hyfforddi sut i wneud dillad fel ffrogiau, sgertiau, blowsys, pan ail-ddechreuodd hi yn y ffatri. Dywedodd iddi ei dysgu ei hun wrth wneud yr *outwork*, sef *blouses, nightdresses, oven gloves, tea-towels*. *'Piece work'* maen nhw'n galw'r gwaith cartref **"ychydig beth fan hyn, ychydig beth fan hyn, ychydig beth pan oedd y plentyn wedi mynd i'r gwely."** Ond pan oedd hi wrthi drwy'r dydd, meddai, roedd y gwaith yn galed. Câl hi gyflog o bedair punt am wniô, yr un faint ag am weithio yn y swyddfa. Pan oedd hi'n gweithio yn y swyddfa, cwrddodd â'i gŵr, a oedd yn gweithio yno yn torri'r dillad allan, ond roedden nhw wedi nabod ei gilydd ers talwm. Wnaethon nhw ddim priodi cyn cael eu plentyn, ond ar ôl.

Mae'n disgrifio'r cyfnod y bu hi'n gwnïo yn y ffatri fel yr amser gorau erioed: Dyma y **'dyddiau mwyaf hapus erioed yn Laura Ashley. On ni'n neud y gwaith, wrthi o hyd, ac o hyd, ond on ni'n cael lot o sbort. Lot, lot o sbort. On ni gweld ni, chi mod, yn gwneud pile o collars, pile o cuffs, troi nhw i gyd trwodd cyn presio nhw. On ni'n mynd â rhai ohonyn nhw adre i smwddio erbyn nos i helpu gwneud rhagor o bres y diwrnod wedyn.'**

Roedd hi'n hapus i newid o waith swyddfa i waith gwnïo, achos roedd hi wedi bod yn gwnïo ar hyd yr amser. Roedd ei nain wedi dangos iddi sut i wau ac embroidro. Felly, doedd neb yn rhoi hyfforddiant iddi i wneud gwaith cartref. Roedd bechgyn yn mynd â'r bagiau rownd (y tai) a dim ond copïo'r enghreifftiau, e.e. blows, roedd o'n dangos iddi *"That's what's in the bag, do it."* Ac felly roedd rhaid iddi weithio allan beth oedd beth ayyb. **Gwaith cartref oedd pethau fel tea-towels, oven gloves, smocks gyda phocedi yn y blaen, ond yn y ffatri roedden nhw'n gwneud mwy o sgertiau a ffrogiau a capes. Roedd hi'n cael rhyw £2 am weithio gartref, yn cael un bag bob wythnos fel arfer, yn cael ei thalu am yr eitemau roedd hi wedi eu gwneud, e.e. 3c am bob un.**

Roedd hi'n mwynhau gwnïo ac yn gwneud dillad i'w mab ei hun i fynd i'r ysgol.

15:00 Doedd dim rhaid iddi gael cyfweliad ar gyfer swydd yn y ffatri, achos roedd hi wedi bod yn gweithio gartref am ryw bedair blynedd. Dywedodd wrth yr Ashley's nad oedd hi eisiau rhagor o *outwork* ond ei bod hi eisiau mynd i mewn i'r ffatri. Aeth hi i mewn i'r hen ffatri pan oedd hi yn y swyddfa, roedd ei mam a'i thad yn byw reit gyferbyn. Pan aeth i mewn i'r ffatri'r ail dro, doedd yr adeilad mawr glas heb gael ei adeiladu. Aeth hi i mewn i ryw adeilad 'top' wrth yr orsaf, ac ar ôl i hwnnw gael ei lenwi, adeiladon nhw'r ffatri newydd fawr.

Roedd hi'n nabod pawb yn ffatri Carno, roedd pawb yn lleol yn y dyddiau cyn i'r cwmni dyfu. Roedd Mo Lewis wedi dweud mai hi a'i chwaer Rosina oedd peirianwyr cyntaf Laura Ashley (VN002) ond yn ôl Gwlithyn, dwy ferch o Landinam oedd y cyntaf, a hi ac Ann Puw yn y swyddfa. Roedd hyd yn oed y bechgyn a oedd yn torri allan yn lleol, meddai. Doedd y cwmni ddim wedi tyfu bryd hynny, yn y 70au cynnar. Wedyn, agoron nhw ffatrioedd ym Machynlleth, Caernarfon, Llanidloes, y Drenewydd, Gresffordd ayyb.

Roedd yn ffatri yn iawn, yn ddigon cyfforddus, meddai. Roedd cantîn yno, a hen wraig o'r enw Gwenni yn gwneud y te, a'r cinio, ac yn dod â chacennau wedi eu gwneud gartref i mewn ar ddydd Gwener. Meddai Gwlithyn **"Laura Ashley oedd fy favourite i, hi oedd y driving force, chi'n gwybod. Dim ots faint o waith oedd gynnwys ni i wneud, 'sa gynnwys ni i order, 'sa hi**

ddim yn gorfod gofyn fasa ni'n gweithio overtime, fasa pawb yn bendio drosodd i helpu hi. Ond oedd hi yn helpu ni hefyd." Os oedd order mawr, byddai hi yn eistedd lawr i wñio ei hunan, roedd hi'n "gariadus ofnadwy." Meddai, os oedden nhw'n cael 40 pence am wneud ffrog a doedd y pris ddim yn iawn, byddai Laura yn gweiddi ar frawd Gwlithyn "*Meirion, come here and retime this dress, these girls aren't happy.*" A byddai o wedyn yn rhoi rhyw 2 pence, neu 10 pence, arni - rhywbeth i gadw'r merched yn hapus. Roedd hi'n iawn, meddai, yn gweithio efo'i brawd fel *manager* ond os oedd na 'row' i rhoi, roedd o'n '*pointio'r gun'* tuag at Gwlithyn a byddai pawb yn gwranddo.

20:00 Pan adawodd Gwlithyn y swyddfa yn 1966 i gael ei phlentyn, cafodd un o'i chworydd y swydd, ac aeth ei brawd ifancach, Alun, a oedd newydd adael yr ysgol, yn syth i mewn i swydd printio yn y ffatri. Bryd hynny, roedd ei mam yn smwddio yno, ei thad yn glanhau, Meirion yn torri allan, Alun yn printio, Gwyneira, ei chwaer hynaf, yn dderbynnu. Ac yn nes ymlaen, daeth ei brawd arall, Sulwyn, yno hefyd. Dywedodd Gwlithyn stori ddiddorol am ei brawd, Meirion. Ffermio oedd o ac yn cneifio mewn cystadleuaeth yn y Sioe Frenhinol un flwyddyn, ac wedyn 'dros beint' yn y pub, dywedodd Bernard Ashley wrtho "**I hear you've been shearing in the Royal Welsh? Well I want you to come and work with me.**" "**I'll give it a go,**" meddai Meirion. Dechreuodd yn torri'r deunydd ar gyfer y ffrogiau ac un diwrnod, gwnaeth camgymeriad, a thorri tipyn gormod i ffwrdd o'r *neckline*. Gwnaeth o banico a galwodd ar Laura Ashley ac meddai hi, "*Well, we'll try it and see how it goes*" a daeth y math hwnnw o '*scoop neckline*' un o'r '*best sellers!*'

Roedd Meirion yn gweithio'n galed, gan gynnwys mynd efo'r loris i lawr i Lundain ar ôl gorffen gwaith am 5 o'r gloch, ac yna i fyny'n ôl. Roedd ganddo fo 'bond' da efo Laura Ashley, roedd hi'n gallu trystio fo i wneud unrhyw beth, ac oherwydd hynny a'i waith caled, daeth yn *managing director*.

Doedd o ddim yn waith caled nac yn ffurfiol iawn, ond roedd y gweithwyr i gyd yn gwybod beth oedden nhw i fod i'w wneud. Doedd neb yn sbïo dros eu hysgwyddau nhw. Roeddech chi'n gwybod beth i'w wneud a faint o amser oedd gynnoch chi, ac os oeddech chi angen help i orffen, dim ond dweud a gofyn am help oedd yn rhaid i chi. Roedd rhaid iddynt glocio mewn a mas. Roedden ganddyn nhw'r hawl i gael amser i ffwrdd, i fynd â'r plant at y meddyg neu'r deintydd ayyb, a bob amser roedden nhw'n gofyn '*How will you get there?*' h.y. roedden nhw'n fodlon cynnig help efo'r teithio os oedd angen. Roedd hi fel gweithio i deulu.

28:00 Roedd y dynion oedd yn gweithio yno yn gwneud pethau fel *dying*, peintio, golchi'r defnydd, torri'r dillad allan. Roedd Gwlithyn yn gwneud pob math o ddillad. **'Roedd o'n dibynnu beth oedd ar yr order. Falle oedd e'n two hundred o blowsys, neu un steil o ffrog, neu gwahanol steil, oedden nhw'n 'consentretio' ar un steil, chi'n gwybod, a unwaith roedd y siopau wedi llenwi efo'r steil yna, 'sai siopydd yn galw am steil arall.'** Dibynnu ar beth oedd y siopau eisiau, roedden nhw'n deud wrth y bechgyn beth i dorri allan a byddai'r deunydd yn dod at y merched i'w wñio. Roedd pob peiriannwr yn gwneud ffrog gyfan, nid darnau ar wahân, heblaw'r *overlocking*, a oedd yn mynd dros y *seams*. **Felly, byddai Gwlithyn yn gwneud y ffrog gyfan a byddai'r ferch ar yr overlocking yn mynd dros y seams wedyn. Roedden nhw'n cael lot o perks, fel seconds, e.e. ffrogiau oedd wedi cael eu gwneud y seis anghywir gan ferched a oedd yn cael eu hyfforddi.**

"Oh, oedden ni'n cael lot o perks. Fel enghraifft, dedwch chi oedden nhw'n mesur bob ffrog cyn iddi fynd allan i'r siop, a pan dach chi'n joinio'r garment i fyny, dim ond gorfod cael centimetre seam allowance amser on i'n gweithio yn y ffatri. Wel, dedwch chi bod merch yn

dechrau trainio, a falle wnaeth hi gymryd *one and a half centimeters*, neu *two centimeters*, so pan oedd y *garments* yn mynd ar y *rail*, i gael eu mesur, roedd falle wedi mynd lawr o size 12 i size 8. Ac wedyn dyna beth oedd dim yn *acceptable* yn y *shops*, dyna be oedden ni'n cael y *perks* o brynu . . . Ond doedden nhw ddim mor *fussy* efo *sizing* pan dechreuson ni yn y ffatri. Ond fel roedd y blynyddoedd yn mynd a mwy o siopau yn agor, roedden nhw'n gorfod bod i'r *millimetre*."

Roedd awyrgylch y ffatri wedi newid llawer yn ystod amser Gwlithyn, yn enwedig ar ôl marwolaeth Laura Ashley. "*Dyna pan oedd 'na complete change*." Ar ôl hynny, daeth pobl ddiarth i mewn, tua diwedd yr 80au oedd hyn, a doedd pethau ddim mor agos ag oedd o ar hyd y blynyddoedd cynt, a "**doedd o ddim yn hapus, doedd o ddim yn hapus.**" Dywedodd Gwlithyn fod y gweithwyr i gyd wedi torri'u eu calonnau pan fu farw Laura Ashley. "**Roedd pawb yn heartbroken - pawb oedd wedi buildio'r ffyrm i fyny efo hi, chi'n gwybod,**". Roedden nhw'n meddwl bod y bobl newydd dim yn deall pa mor agos yr oedd y berthynas rhyngddi hi a'r gweithwyr - bod y ffatri wedi tyfu mewn ffordd deuluol bron. Roedd yr Ashley's wedi gwneud llawer i'r pentref, er bod Bernard yn gallu fod yn *sarcastic*. Roedd y gweithwyr yn gorfod meddwl ddwywaith cyn dweud unrhywbeth wrtho fo, ond dim efo Laura Ashley. Roedd ganddo fo ffordd o siarad gwahanol iddi hi. "**Teulu bach oedd Carno**", meddai Gwlithyn. "**Roedd hi wedi helpu pawb, wedi gwneud lot i'r pentre**". Roedd perthynas hefyd rhwng y gweithwyr a phlant yr Ashley's, oedd yn dod i mewn i'r ffatri o hyd ac yn siarad efo'r gweithwyr.

Bu Gwlithyn yn gweithio i Laura Ashley am tua 48 o flynyddoedd, gan gynnwys ei gwaith yn y swyddfa a'r *outwork*. Cafodd ei gwneud yn *redundant* o ffatri Carno, pan newidiodd honno i wneud llenni ac i anfon y dillad dramor i gael eu gwneud. Bryd hynny, yn 1999, roedd Gwlithyn yn *supervisor* a chawson nhw i gyd sioc fawr pan glywon nhw nad oedden nhw yn mynd i wneud dillad byth eto "*No more garments*" oedd y penderfyniad o Lundain. Ar ôl hyn, roedd hi'n gwneud tipyn o wnïo gartref, ond un diwrnod ffoniodd y rheolwraig o'r ffatri lenni i ofyn beth oedd hi'n ei wneud ac a oedd hi'n fodlon dod yn ôl i ffatri oherwydd roedd ganddyn nhw *order* ar frys. "**What are you doing, Gwlithyn?**" "**Well, not a lot**", medda fi, "**a bit of sewing at home.**" "**Come and help us, we've got some urgent orders to do.**" Roedd hynny yn erbyn y gyfraith, meddwn i, sef i dderbyn gwaith yn syth ar ôl cael *redundancy*, - rhaid aros chwe mis, felly doedd hi ddim yn gallu mynd yn syth, yn llawn amser, ond aeth hi i helpu. Gwnaeth hi gais am swydd lawn amser ar ôl chwe mis ac roedd yn gwneud cyrtens ac ati ar gyfer Laura Ashley Home Stylist, ac yn gweithio o 2001 tan iddi ymddeol yn 2011.

39:00 Daeth hi yn *supervisor* oherwydd roedd yn rhaid cael rhywun i trainio merched newydd, dysgu iddynt i wneud *pleats, tucks, cuffs, collars* ayyb. Doedd dim digon o ferched efo'r math o sgiliau oedd gan Gwlithyn, oherwydd roedd hi wedi bod yno am amser hir. Aeth hi ar gwrs, yn 1988, wedi ei dalu gan y ffatri. Cafodd y cwrs ei gynnal yn y ffatri yng Ngharno, yn y stafell gyfarfod. Roedd o'n fwy o asesiad na chwrs, roedd rhywun yn gwylio sut roedd hi'n trainio eraill, a phasiodd hi a chafodd hi dystysgrif (VN013.21). **Chafodd hi ddim codiad cyflog mewn gwirionedd, achos roedd hi wedi bod yn gwneud piece work a doedd hi byth yn gwybod yn hollol faint fyddai hi'n ei gael bob wythnos, achos roedd y tâl yn dibynnu ar faint o waith roeddech chi wedi'i wneud. Ond fel supervisor, meddai, roedd hi'n gwybod yn hollol faint roedd hi'n ei ennill bob wythnos, ac wrth gwrs roedd mwy o gyfrifoldeb.**

Yn y ffatri newydd yng Ngharno, yr adeg hynny, roedd pump *supervisors*, meddai, ac ugain o ferched, ac oedd y rheolwyr yn cerdded i lawr rhwng y peirianwyr ac yn gwneud yn siŵr eu bod nhw'n gwneud y gwaith yn gywir, ac os nad oedden nhw, yn dangos iddynt y ffordd gywir, a gwneud yn siŵr fod ganddynt ddigon o waith ayyb. Ond, ar ôl pedwar deg o flynyddoedd, a'r

profiad roedd hi wedi'i gael yn gwnïo, meddai Gwlithyn, roedd *management* y ffatri yn y cyfnod diweddar yn siarad efo hi fel petai yn blentyn, '*undermining*' hi fel petai.

O ran *perks* yn y dyddiau cynnar, roedden nhw'n cael mynd â *zips, cottons* a oedd yn mynd allan o stoc, neu ddeunydd a oedd ar ôl, roedd hawl i'r gweithwyr eu helpu eu hunain, neu os oedd paent, papur wal sbar, roedden nhw'n cael mynd â nhw adre "*Whatever you want from there, take it.*" Roedd Gwlithyn yn gwisgo dillad bob dydd i'r gwaith, er ei bod wedi gwisgo smociau Laura Ashley hefyd yn y dyddiau cynnar, smociau efo pocedi mawr yr oedden nhw wedi'u gwneud eu hunain i arbed eu dillad eu hunain.

O ran '*health and safety*' roedd yna ambell i ddamwain fach; "O, dw i wedi cael ambell un. O, mae hyn yn dda! On i wedi bod yn iwsio'r *gathering foot*, dangos i rywun ffordd i wneud *gathers*, a dach chi'n rhoi'r *gathering foot* 'ma ymlaen ar y mashîn, a chi'n dal eich bys tu ôl i'r *foot*, i roi *pressure* arno, ac wedyn, crinclo i fyny i gyd, *so*, dw i ddim yn gwbod beth hapnodd, ond fel on i'n rhoi 'mys, aeth y nodwydd mewn i 'mys i. Ac, on i'n gorfod rhoi fo yn llyfr, 'te. A gofynnodd y *first aider*. "*Is it alright?*" "*Oh yes*", medda fi, "*it's fine, it's only a bit numb at the top, it's fine.*" "*Oh, you've got to go to the doctor.*" "*I'm not going to the doctor,*" medda fi, "*It's fine.*" So es i lawr i'r doctor rŵan a, "*Oh, you'll have to go to Aberystwyth for an X-ray.*" "*What for? There's nothing wrong with it.*" Roedd 'na tri twll ac roedd 'na bisyn o nodwydd yn sefyll rhwng y ddau dwll." Doedd hi ddim wedi sylwi a dywedodd doedd o ddim yn boenus tan iddyn nhw dynnu fo allan. Aeth i Aberystwyth yn y '*firm's car*, ' a rhywun o Laura Ashley yn gyrru, i gael x-ray. Roedd hi yn ôl yn y gwaith y diwrnod wedyn, er iddyn nhw ddweud wrthi hi gael ychydig o ddyddiau i ffwrdd gyda thâl. "Oeddech chi ddim yn licio sgeifio achos oeddech chi'n meddwl, wel, *you owe it to them*, chi'n gwbod." Dywedodd Gwlithyn nad oedd unrhyw un yn cael amser i ffwrdd oni bai bod 'na esgus go iawn.'

O ran partis, roedd lot o hwyl, meddai, ar adegau pen-blwydd neu briodas rhywun. Tu ôl i'r Dye House, yng Ngharno, roedd pwll mawr ac os oedd rhywun yn priodi, i mewn i'r pwll â nhw. Roedd rhywun wedi dod â dillad sbar i'r person oedd yn mynd i mewn - "*She's going in the water, somebody bring some spare clothes.*" Dywedodd Gwlithyn na wnaeth hyn ddigwydd iddi hi, achos roedden nhw wedi cau'r pwll erbyn iddi hi briodi - wedi gweld y perygl, mae'n debyg. Roedden nhw'n cael nosweithiau allan efo plant Laura Ashley, Nick a Jane, ond dim cymaint efo'r mab hynaf David, a oedd yn cadw iddo fo'i hun.

Dydy Gwlithyn ddim yn gwybod sut dechreuodd y tîm pêl-droed, ond mae'n meddwl bod rhyw ffatri neu gilydd wedi bod yn chwarae pêl-droed mewn sioe a daeth y gair i Carno, a dywedon nhw "*Oh, let's get a football team.*" Aeth y gair at Bernard a Laura Ashley "*These girls want a football team so they can play on a Sunday against the shops.*" "*Great idea.*" Prynson nhw'r cit i ni, un gwyrdd â'r Ddraig Goch, a oedden ni'n mynd bob dydd Sul, chwarae yn Llanidloes, neu Fachynlleth, neu Gaernarfon, neu yn Garno. O, oedden ni'n cael hwyl. Aniwe, aethon ni lawr i chwarae yn erbyn y siopau yn Llundain, a choeliech chi byth, oedden ni'n chwarae ar gae tu allan i Wormwood Scrubs." Roedd y Cymry yn yfed yn yr hotel y noson gynt, efo pobl Saesneg, ac fel Cymry yn yfed ac yn canu, ac roedd pawb eisiau iddyn nhw'n ganu mwy. Roedd llawer o'r merched yn chwarae efo '*hangover*' - "*worse for wear*" - y diwrnod wedyn, a'r carcharorion yn gweiddi arnynt o'r ffenestri. Roedd Gwlithyn yn chwarae safle canolwr. Mae wedi colli'r cit a'r bŵts ers talwm. Roedd yr Ashleys yn talu popeth – y taith a'r hotel - ac roedd y tîm y mynd am rai blynyddoedd, nes i'r merched ddechrau priodi, cael babis, neu symud i ffwrdd.

53:00 Mae Gwlithyn yn credu mai syniad un o blant yr Ashleys oedd yr '*It's a Knockout*' blynyddol. Planciau dros ddŵr, *pillow fights*, mynd trwy deiars, ac un ar gyfer dynion yn arbennig,

Ile bob tro roedden nhw'n dod at ryw *obstacle*, roedd yn rhaid iddynt newid un darn o'u dillad am ddillad menywod - *tights, corsets*, neu *suspender belts*. Nid ar gyfer elusen yr oedd y Knockouts ond roedd y pres a godid yn mynd yn ôl i gronfa i gael rhagor o adloniant. “*Good days*” meddai hi. Amser Nadolig roedden nhw'n arfer mynd allan. Cawson nhw ddathliad hefyd pan enillwyd y *Queen's Award for Industry*, yn *Deeside*. Cawson nhw froets arian ac mae gan Gwlithyn ei hun hi o hyd. “*Very precious, hwnna.*”

Doedd dim llawer o anghytundeb rhwng gweithwyr Laura Ashley, pawb yn dod ymlaen yn iawn. Os oedd rhyw bwnc fel codiad tal, roedden nhw'n trafod hyn gyda'r Ashleys a dod i gytundeb. “**Os on nhw'n deud “Dw i ddim yn cael digon o bres am wneud y sgert 'ma, neu'r ffrog 'ma neu'r garment 'ma, well, ‘We'll look at it,’ so on ni'n galw'r management mas a teimio fo eto, efallai sen nhw'n deud, 'no it's alright' or 'yes, we'll put a penny on it, or something.’”**

Doedd Bernard Ashley ddim eisiau undeb yn y ffatri, ac roedd pawb yn gwybod hynny. Daeth rhywun yno ryw dro i weithio a dywedodd y person yna rywbeth am undeb. “Ac oedden ni i gyd y gwybod, o'r ferri cychwyn, doedd Bernard a Laura Ashley ddim eisio *union*. A wneson ni ddim *questiono* fo o gwbl. Ond fel oedd y blynyddoedd yn mynd a pobl newydd yn dod i mewn, roedd 'na *union* eisiau, *definitely*, ond dim yr amser oedd hi'n fyw, chi'n gwybod, fasai *union* wedi sboilio fo.” Yn y diwedd, pan ymddeolodd Gwlithyn, roedd angen undeb yn y ffatri, er na fu hi'n aelod o undeb erioed, meddai.

Disgrifia'r ffatri yn y dyddiau cynnar: “**Adeg hynny, amser oeddwn i'n gweithio yno, lle on i'n gweithio, oedd na fel *tin roof* arno, ac oedd hi'n rhewi yn y gaeaf, berwi yn yr haf, a *no air conditioning*, wel, ‘sa *union* wedi helpu fan 'na.”** Roedd hi a phobl eraill wedi cwyno am y pethau hyn ond doedd neb yn gwranddo, meddai, ac roedd hi wedi dygymod â'r peth, achos y ffordd dda roedd yr Ashleys yn eu trin nhw. Mae Gwlithyn yn cofio adeg pan oedd y lle mor boeth, doedd hi ddim yn gallu gweithio a'i bod yn dod adre o'r gwaith *'absolutely drained.'* Gallai hi fynd i fyny'r grisiau i weithio un diwrnod a gweld dŵr ar y llawr, gyda'r trydan, cael *health and safety* i sychu fo, mynd at y *management*, ond dim byd yn cael ei wneud. Yn y gaeaf, byddai hi'n gweithio mewn cot a menig, ac roedd hi'n gorfod "jumpio mewn i'r bath i gynhesu" ar ôl diwrnod o waith. Ond chafodd dim byd ei wneud am broblemau hyn, achos, meddai, yr ateb bob amser oedd "*It costs money. So, give up, give up.*"

Doedd y ffatri newydd ddim yn swllyd lle roedd hi'n gweithio, lan y grisiau yn gwneud *'Home Stylists'* - yn yr 80/90au oedd hyn (yn y Drenewydd?), roedd y merched lawr star yn ? gwneud ? cael sŵn. Lle roedd Gwlithyn yn gweithio, roedden nhw'n cael *'fumes'* o'r printio papur wal golchadwy, ac roedd yn rhaid iddynt agor y ffenestri oherwydd bod eu llygaid yn rhedeg. Yn ffatri'r Drenewydd ddwy flynedd yn ôl roedd hyn yn digwydd, meddai. Yng Ngharno, pan oedd hi lawr grisiau, doedd dim cymaint o sŵn fel nad oedden nhw'n gallu siarad a gwranddo ar y radio. Roedd y printio mewn darn arall. **Roedd y radio ymlaen drwy'r dydd, ac roedden nhw siarad am bethau fel beth oedden nhw'n eiwneud dros y penwythnos, hanes y teulu, “rhedeg y gŵr i lawr.”**

Mae'n cofio adeg pan oedd pedair ohonynt yn gwneud pum ffrog - “pump *velvet burgundy dresses*, dwy ferch ochr yma i'r bwrdd, dwy ferch yr ochr arall” - ac roedd yn rhaid i'r ffrogiau fynd allan erbyn diwedd y diwrnod. Dywedodd un o'r merched “*Oh, look at this makeup I bought at the weekend.*” A thra'i bod hi'n dangos y *'make up'* newydd i'r lleill, aeth o dros un o'r *dresses!* Wnaethon nhw redeg i'r cutting room am ddarn arall o ddeunydd, a dim gallu mynd adre tan iddyn nhw orffen, a rhoi'r darn â'r *make up* arno yn y bin heb i neb wybod. “*You wait 'til Laura Ashley comes here, she'll want to know where that piece has gone.*”

1.08 Cymraeg oedd yr iaith yn y cychwyn, ond daeth yr iaith yn *mixed* erbyn y diwedd. Dywedodd Gwlithyn hanes rhyw ferch o Dywyn a oedd yn siarad Cymraeg gyda Gwlithyn yn y ffatri yn y Drenewydd, ryw bum mlynedd cyn iddi hi ymddeol. Daeth y *manager* atynt a dweud "***Don't speak Welsh, I can't understand you.***" "***Well, I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Gwen and she's Welsh,***" atebodd Gwlithyn. "***It's ignorant.***" A dywedodd y ferch, Gwen, "***It's you that's ignorant because this is our native tongue.***" Gofynnodd Gwlithyn am *apology* a chafodd hi un ar ôl iddi fygwth mynd at *HR*.

Dechreuodd Gwlithyn yn Laura Ashley yn 1964; symudodd hi i'r Drenewydd yn 2003; ymddeol yn 2011. Mae'n cofio'r dyddiau cynnar fel y blynyddoedd gorau, pan oedd y ffatri yn tyfu o ryw bump ohonynt i dros gant, amser hapus, pawb yn ffrindiau, pawb yn mynd allan gyda'r nos efo'i gilydd; pawb yn helpu ei gilydd, ac yn enwedig y berthynas rhyngddynt a Laura Ashley. Fel mam, roedd hi'n gallu ymdopi yn iawn efo gweithio a chael plentyn yn yr ysgol, er bod ei gŵr i ffwrdd y rhan fwyaf o'r wythnos, yn gyrru loris Laura Ashley i ddinasoedd pell. Wrth edrych yn ôl dros ei 40 o flynyddoedd o waith, mae Gwlithyn yn dweud ei bod hi wedi dysgu amynedd ac annibyniaeth. Mae'n deud bod yr *outwork* yn galed, achos bod y peiriant yn fach, ond mae ganddi lawer i fod yn ddiolchgar amdano, roedd pawb wedi gallu prynu tŷ, neb allan o waith. Mae'n son am ffrind oedd yn methu ffindio'r *deposit* i brynu tŷ a rhoddodd Bernard Ashley'r deposit iddi fel benthyciad. Diwrnodau hapus a drygionus iawn, meddai.

Hyd : 1 awr, 20 munud.

English summary

Laura Ashley, Carno (1964-2003) & Laura Ashley, Newtown (2003-11)

Interviewee: VN013 Gwlithyn Rowlands,

Date: 05: 02: 2014

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

Gwlithyn was born on 23rd May, 1947 in Caersws. Her mother was a housewife and her father worked on a farm. He retired from farming due to arthritis and got work as a cleaner in the Laura Ashley factory in Carno. Her mother got work there pressing on a part-time basis later on. **She had three sisters and four brothers, and all of them, with the exception of one, worked at Laura Ashley. Her brother, Meirion, had been sheep shearing on a farm when he was asked by Bernard Ashley if he would like to cut fabric at the factory. He became a Managing Director in the end.**

Gwlithyn went to a Welsh school in Carno and then on to a secondary English school in Newtown, which she found difficult. She left school when she was fifteen years old. **'Whatever you did,**

you had to find a job.' She got a job in a shop in Newtown, and then in a factory there which made car parts. It was dirty work and she didn't like it.

She went back to shop work and then got a job in the office at Laura Ashley in 1964 helping with the salaries. She left in 1966 to have her son (without getting married) and then got work as an outworker for Laura Ashley. She'd never sewn before but thought she would give it a go to earn some money. The factory brought a machine to the house, and would then bring her bags of material and the completed work which would be collected in a few days. **She worked as an outworker like this until her son went to school in 1970-1, and then went into the factory to work nine until three. Laura Ashley was adamant that any mother that worked for her could take their children to school and be allowed time to collect them.** When her son was older she worked from eight until five.

When Gwlithyn started as a clerk in 1964 there were four men working as engineers, and two men printing there. **She wasn't interviewed for the job, she just told Laura Ashley she was out of work. Laura Ashley told her to come in and she'd find a job for her.** She didn't know them personally but her mother looked after Laura's little girl, and they lived opposite the original factory. Her first job was answering the phone, doing the wages and making cups of tea for four pounds and something.

9:00 She was trained to make dresses, skirts and blouses when she returned to the factory. She taught herself when she was doing the out-work and was paid on a piece work basis. When she was sewing all day in the factory it was hard work. Her wage was the same for sewing as it was for working in the office. She met her husband when she worked in the office. He was a cutter but they'd known each other for a while. They married after having their child.

The period when she was sewing in the factory was the best time at the factory: **'the happiest days ever in Laura Ashley... We had a lot of fun ..'** **She would take some of the collars and cuff home for pressing in order to earn some extra money.**

She was happy with the change from office work to sewing. She knew how to sew and her grandmother had taught her to knit and embroider. When she was an out-worker the boys would bring the bags and she would copy the samples. **The type of work done at home was tea towels, oven gloves, and smocks with a front pocket. In the factory they made dresses and capes. She earned two pounds a week for working at home, would get one bag per week, and was paid for the items she'd made, eg three pence for each one.**

She enjoyed sewing and made clothes for her son to go to school.

15:00 She didn't need to be interviewed for the factory job because she'd been working for them at home for four years. She told the Ashleys that she would like to work at the factory. When she went back to work at the factory the second time the large blue building had not yet been built. She went to work in a building near the station, and when that became full they built the new large factory.

She knew everybody in the factory in Carno. The workers were local people in the days before the company grew. Mo Lewis said that she and her sister Rosina were the first engineers in Laura Ashley. (VN002) but according to Gwlithyn two women from Llandinam were the first, with her and Ann Puw in the office. Even the boys doing the cutting were local. This was in the 1970s before the company had grown. They then opened factories in Machynlleth, Caernarfon,

Llanidloes, Newtown, and Gresford.

The factory was quite comfortable. There was a canteen with an old woman called Gwenni who made the tea and lunch. She brought home-made cakes in on a Friday. **"Laura Ashley was my favourite, she was the driving force.... If we had an order, she didn't have to ask us to do over time, everybody would bend over backwards to help. She helped us as well. "**

If there was a large order she would sit down herself, she was very loving. If they were having forty pence for making a dress and the amount didn't seem right Laura would call Gwlithyn's brother over and tell him to re-time the making of the dress as the girls weren't happy. If Meirion was giving the girls a row he would direct it towards Gwlithyn, but everybody listened.

20:00 When Gwlithyn left the office job in 1966 to have her child her sister got the job. Her younger brother, Alun, got a job printing there too. At one time, her mother worked there pressing, her father cleaned, her brother Meirion was a cutter, Alun was printing, and Gwyneira her eldest sister was a receptionist. Later on her other brother, Sulwyn, came to work there too. Meirion was having a pint in the pub after shearing in the Royal Welsh when he was offered the job by Bernard. He started cutting the material for the dresses but made a mistake one day and cut too much. He told Laura Ashley and she said they would try this scoop neckline style. It became one of their best sellers.

Meirion was a hard worker and would go to London and back with the lorries after finishing work at five o'clock. He had a good bond with Laura Ashley and was trusted by her which is how he became managing director.

Work at the factory wasn't hard or formal, and all the workers knew what they had to do. If you needed help to finish you would ask. They clocked in and out. They could have time off to take the children to see the dentist or doctor and would offer help with the transport. It was like being part of a family.

28:00 The men there worked on the dyeing, painting, washing the fabric, and cutting the fabric. Gwlithyn made all types of clothes, depending on what the order was. They normally concentrated on one particular style of garment before moving on to something else. The machinists would make the whole garment rather than part of it, apart from the over-locking. They had many perks such as seconds that had been produced by the girls who were training.

They had to measure every dress before it went to the shop, and when the garments were being joined the seam allowance had to be a centimetre. If one of the girls training took a centimetre and a half or two centimetres the garment might go down from a size 12 to a size 8, and this would be unacceptable. The workers could buy the garments that didn't meet the standard for being sent out to the shops. They weren't that fussy about sizing when she first started but as more and more shops opened they had to be correct, down to the nearest millimetre.

The atmosphere changed considerably over the years, especially after the death of Laura Ashley. Strangers came in to run the place towards the end of the 1980s and it felt less like a family atmosphere. The workers broke their hearts when she died. The new people didn't appreciate the relationship that had existed between Laura Ashley and her workers. The Ashleys had done a lot for the village, even though Bernard could be sarcastic. His manner was different to his wife's. The workers also knew the Ashley children who came into the factory and would speak to the workers.

Gwlithyn worked for Laura Ashley for about forty eight years including the office and outwork. She was made redundant when they started making curtains and sent the clothes abroad to be made. In 1999 they were all shocked when they heard that they would no longer be making clothes (Gwlithyn was a supervisor at the time.) After this she did some sewing at home. The manageress phoned her one day to ask her if she could come and help because they had a rush order on. This was illegal as she would need to wait six months after the redundancy before accepting work. She couldn't go back full time straight away but she went to help. She applied for a full time job after six months and made curtains for Laura Ashley Home Stylist and worked from 2001 until 2011, when she retired.

39:00 She became a supervisor because somebody with her experience was needed to train the new girls how to do pleats, tucks, cuffs, collars, etc . She went on a company-paid course in 1988 which was held in the meeting room in Carno. She passed and got a certificate. (VN013.21) but **she really receive a pay rise. She'd been doing piece work previously so can't really compare the wages for the two different jobs. As a supervisor she knew exactly how much she earned every week and there was more responsibility.**

There were five supervisors at the factory in Carno, and twenty machinists. The managers would walk down between the machinists in order to ensure that they were doing their work properly and to make sure they had enough to do. In the latter years, the management would speak to her as if she was a child, despite all her experience.

In the early days they were allowed to take zips and cottons that were going out of stock home, as well as left over material, paint, and wall paper. Gwlithyn wore her own clothes to work, although she also wore Laura Ashley smocks in the early days. They made them themselves and had large pockets.

There were occasionally small accidents. Gwlithyn had an accident when she was showing somebody how to make gathers with the gathering foot. The needle went through her thumb. The first aider insisted she went to see the doctor despite her protestations that she was fine. The doctor sent her for an x-ray in Aberystwyth and they discovered that there was still a piece of needle in her thumb. It wasn't painful until they removed it. She was driven to Aberystwyth in the company's car. She was back in work the next day, even though they'd told her to take a few paid days off. **"You didn't like to skive because you thought you owed it to them"**. Nobody took time off without good reason.

There was lots of fun in the event of a birthday or wedding. There was a big pond behind the Dye House in Carno, and if somebody was getting married they would be thrown in. Somebody would have brought spare clothes for them. **"She's going in the water, somebody bring some spare clothes."** This didn't happen to Gwlithyn because they'd shut the pool by the time that she got married. They had nights out with Laura Ashley's children – Nick and Jane, but not as many with the younger son, David.

Word reached Bernard and Laura Ashley that the girls wanted to start a football team. **"These girls want a football team so they can play on a Sunday against the shops."** **"Great idea."** **They bought them the kit which was green with the red dragon on it, and they would play every Sunday in Llanidloes, Machynlleth, Caernarfon or Carno. They had lots of fun. They went down to play in London, and played on a field outside Wormwood Scrubs.** Many of the girls had a hangover after drinking in the hotel the previous evening, and the prisoners were shouting to

them from the windows. Gwlithyn paid in mid-field. **They Ashleys paid for everything – the trip and the hotel – and the team kept going for several years, until the girls started getting married, having babies or moved away.**

53:00 **There was an annual ‘It’s a Knockout,’** where they had planks over water, pillow fights, and tyres to go through. For the men there was a special game – when they reached a particular obstacle they had to swap one item of their clothing for an item of women’s clothing – tights, corsets or suspender belts. The money raised went into the entertainment fund. They usually went out at Christmas time. They also went out when they won the Queen’s Award for Industry, in Deeside. They were given a silver brooch, and Gwlithyn still has hers.

Everybody got on well at the factory. If there were any issues such as pay rises they would discuss them with the Ashleys and reach an agreement.

Bernard and Laura Ashley didn’t want a union in the factory. Everybody knew this and didn’t question it. But as the years went by and new people came in (to manage) the company this changed, especially after the death of Laura Ashley, although Gwlithyn never became a member of a union.

She describes the early days at the factory. **“At that time ... there was a tin roof, and it was freezing in the winter, boiling in the summer, and no air con, well a union would have helped with that.” They complained but nothing happened, and she put up with it because the Ashleys treated them well. Gwlithyn remembers it being so hot she couldn’t work and she would come home absolutely drained. She would go upstairs and see water on the floor, where there was electricity and report it but nothing would be done about it. In the winter, she would work in her coat and gloves and would have a hot bath after going home to warm herself up. Nothing was done about these problems due to the costs involved.**

The part of the factory where she worked upstairs (in Home Styling) was not noisy, but it was noisy downstairs. Where she worked their eyes would water because of the fumes from the wall paper printing process, and they would have to open a window. This was happening in the Newtown factory two years ago. When she worked downstairs in Carno it wasn’t too noisy to talk or listen to the radio. The printing was in another part of the factory. **The radio was on all day and they would chat about what they would be doing on the weekend, the family or criticising their husbands.**

She remembers when there were four of them making five velvet burgundy dresses – two on each side of the table. The dresses had to go out by the end of the day. One of the girls had bought new make-up over the weekend and while she was showing the others, some of spilt over one of the dresses. They ran to the cutting room for another piece of material and couldn’t go home until they’d finished. They hid the piece with the make-up on it in the bin. **“You wait ‘til Laura Ashley comes here, she’ll want to know where that piece has gone.”**

1.08 Welsh was in language of the factory to begin with but then it became mixed. Gwlithyn and a woman called Gwen from Towyn were speaking Welsh in the factory in Newtown about five years before she retired when one of the managers told them, **"Don't speak Welsh, I can't understand you."** **"Well, I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Gwen and she's Welsh," she answered. "It's ignorant."** Gwen said, **"It's you that's ignorant because this is our native tongue."** Gwlithyn asked for an apology and got one after threatening to go to HR.

Gwlithyn started in Laura Ashley in 1964; she moved to Newtown in 2003 and retired in 2011. The early years were the best, when they were only a handful of workers. Everybody was friends, and would socialise with each other in the evening, everybody helped each other and had a good relationship with Laura Ashley.

She managed well as a working mother with a child in school, even though her husband was away driving lorries for Laura Ashley for the best part of the week. Over the course of her forty years work, Gwlithyn learnt patience and independence. The outwork was difficult because the machine was small. All of the workers were able to buy a house. One of her friends didn't have the money to put down as a deposit to buy a house and Bernard Ashley lent it to her.

Duration: 1 hour 20 minutes.