

LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

De Haviland Aircraft Company (1966 - 1976)

Interviewee: Pat R. D.

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Interviewer: M. Grant on behalf of the Women's Archive of Wales

1. Background:

Pat R. D. *Date of Birth:* 29. 11. 49

Tell us a little about your background ... where you were born and about your parents, brothers and sisters:

I've got two sisters, one older and one younger, there's a two year gap between me and my older sister and eight years between me and my younger sister.

My mum and dad are Buckley born and bred, for quite a few generations. I was born in Mancot, but I lived in Buckley until I was married. My dad worked in British Steel, it was John Summers when he was there and now it's Corus factory. He was a store keeper and before that he worked in the potteries in Buckley when he was a lad; his first job was in the mines in Buckley, where he started at fourteen. My mum never really worked, but during the war years she was in Vickers, which is now British Aerospace – it went through a few changes. She was an inspector on the Spitfires in the war that was her main job.

Where were you educated?

My schools were in Buckley: Buckley Board School and then the Elfed after.

When did you leave school?

I left in the Easter in 1966. I left before I took any exams whatsoever. I always froze in exams. My dad always said if I got a job I could leave when I was ready to go; which I did. I went down to De Havilland's, there were no phones, you had to go. I went to the employment and they gave me an interview and a time and told me to come back in a couple of days time

for the proper interview. They gave me a test on Maths only, I passed the test and they said that I could start after Easter. They had a vacancy as a post-girl which was taking the mail all round the factory four times a day, picking up mail, franking it and sending it or keeping it internal, whichever the case may be. We had to go walking all round the factory with mail bags on us, and it was quite a nice little job. We knew every department in the factory.

How did you feel about leaving school then?

I was happy about leaving school because I was no good at exams, I just froze. I hated exams, I couldn't even think of my name sometimes.

[3' 40''] **2. Work**

Was it De Havilland?

It was De Havilland when I went there, started in the mail room. The things I learnt there was quite amazing. I went on to the Gestetner machines alongside the mailing room and in between the typing room, and I learnt a lot about printing. One year the head was off and the programme for the fete was due to go out, it was always in five colours; I printed all the colours for that and I was really chuffed. The trouble was the stencil had the boss's name on, not mine.

Did you want to work there?

It was a job. To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted. As I didn't have any qualifications for anything, there, as my dad said, experience, just go from experience and then you're more likely to get a better job, but you've got to have the job to start off with. A job will find you, and work your way up like that – that was my dad's philosophy. Like my sister, my elder sister, she was cleverer than me; she ended up in Summers's. She was a secretary to one of the main bosses, she learnt shorthand and typing, but I couldn't cope with that. It just goes to show...

Can you tell me what did the factory made – and the end product?

When I started there, they made 125 aircraft; they made the parts for all the 125s, except for the engines – they were Rolls Royce, and they were brought in. It was a big assembly line: it would start with nothing and it worked right the way through the factory, right down to the paint shop at the bottom, and then they had all the fittings in the bottom. It was a big concern. As the planes were moved down, high, overhead cranes (which were all female, no male drivers on them at all), they moved them up, just lifted them up in big crates as they went down the assembly line as they went in the crates. As they'd built them, they ended up in the flight shed complete planes.

You said your mum had worked there?

She was on the Spitfire line...

Was any other family member working there?

My auntie worked there, she ended up on security. She was the only female security person there. She had to make quite sure that everything was done...there was thieving and god knows what; that was her type of job.

Things altered on the production line over the years I was there. I started at sixteen and left at twenty six and things altered. When I was about eighteen they started on the first wings for the big aircraft like the Boeings, I'm not sure which ones, and they were taken elsewhere to be assembled on the plane. I think it was France then. They still go to France, but for a different plane now. They built a new factory for the ones that go to France now, but it's all altered. As I worked my way through the factory, when I left the Gestetner, I went and worked on the shop floor in one of the offices for one of the supervisors on the line: taking messages and running things, just doing general paperwork. Then I was transferred down to the Repair and Overhaul section. That was great because all the planes came in to be serviced. When I first started that job the RAF was still there, so it was the Doves and the Devons, like the big 125s. Not everyone came in, but quite a few came in from Switzerland, to be serviced, taken like a car, and then they'd go back out again. I had to leave there to have my son. It was not like today, you couldn't carry on after you had them, you had to leave; six months and you had to go. They wouldn't have you after six months, so you had to leave.

How did you feel about working there?

Oh, I was quite happy. I made a lot of friends there. In fact, I've got one friend I met her on the same day that I started, we both started work on the same day and we're still friends today. She went straight into work as a typist in one of the offices in the factory for one of the bosses, had to tackle minutes and different things, store sheets and things. We're still friends today. We were just one happy bunch.

Was it a place that working there had some status? How was it viewed as a place to work in the locality?

It was one of the mainstays of factory work. It was a big factory. I know some of the men even came from Liverpool to work there, Rhyl and everywhere. They even had transport from Liverpool to bring them in, but they were qualified, it was mainly qualified workmen who came in. They came from all over - the workmen to work there. It was a big factory, not as big a concern as it is now; they built a proper, bigger factory over the other side of the runway. The Repair and Overhaul has been taken over by Raytheon, I don't know if they service them or not, but they were bought out by them. I don't think they've got that section there now. All the sites that were dotted round the airfield and different things like that, they've been altered – a different factory altogether now from when I was there. I wouldn't even recognize it now, I don't think.

[11' 30''] **3. The job ...**

Can you remember your first day at work?

Yes, scared to death, absolutely petrified because I didn't know ... it was way out of my environment, my comfort zone (and I do like comfort zone), but it was very enjoyable. I had

to get the bus at seven o'clock in the morning to go in, it picked me up at the bus stop, it was a proper works bus. My dad had given me money to get my weekly bus pass, I can't remember exactly how much it was, but it wasn't over a pound. I didn't get that much – something like sixteen and six I got when I first started. It was much cheaper paying on a Monday than paying it daily. I got on the bus; I was the only one getting on at my bus stop, so it was a bit out of my comfort zone getting on the bus to start off. But being a Buckley person, they all knew me, as soon as I got on the bus: come and sit here. Anyway they did take me in, I knew where I had to go to the employment place, and they told me to sit in the waiting room - they took me up. And of course, there were girls just a bit older than me, not that much older, maybe a year, working in the mail room. I soon fitted in and they made me feel welcome. That's how it started, happy.

What were your first impressions of the place?

It was massive, absolutely massive. I thought I'll never learn how to find every place, and remembering everywhere I had to go. There was five different routes, we didn't have to go all round the factory all in one go; there was five of us in different sections to go round. One section had a big drive up the front, it's still there, down to the main office blocks, you had to go right up to the top to where the training rooms were for the apprentices; the canteen; and then you had the RAF; the garage; all the paint shops and all the things outside. You were walking right the way down and round, right down to the bottom end of the factory, but on the outside not in. So it was lovely in the winter! I used to take a short cut through the factory, then come out and work my way that way. When the RAF lads were there they were brilliant, because they could see you coming and they would have a warm drink waiting for you. They were a grand bunch, I must admit. It was happy times, you know.

You said you enjoyed the work?

Yes, it was enjoyable. It was work I could do, I was comfortable doing it. I was very happy. I knew I couldn't stay, they changed us round, they only left you there until you were eighteen and then we were transferred into the factory. Nobody stayed there a long time; it was only like a holding bay on the mail.

Your working day was taking mail round was it?

Yes, taking it round and picking it up, when I first started. That was interesting because you got to know all the people in the offices, and you met more people. There are still people who recognise me now.

You went through the whole place?

Yes, 'cause you changed round weekly, doing a different round, so we knew all the factory floor eventually. I thought I'd never learn it, but I did.

There were other people doing the other rounds?

Yes, I think it was six of us and two in the office sorting mail. If anybody was off, you were all covered. *A lot of mail...* And all internal as well, going from department to department, and we did it four times a day. When you got the mail coming in you had all the mail going down to the buying office, invoices and things like that, you just took that in bulk really, but you had to take all the mail to different sections all round.

Was there a lot of women working there?

Yes, there was when I was there, in different places. There wasn't many ... the typing pool was all women - as normal, and they had the secretaries; planning didn't have many women in it at all - I never saw a woman up there anyway; wages had a few women, but it was mainly men. The employment office was run by women, they were all women in that one, there wasn't a male one there. The telephone exchange was all women; and the stationery - when you ordered pens and paper and things like that for the offices - was run by women as well. Quite a lot of it was mainly women, but it was more men on the production, bar from the crane drivers, and cleaners were women, but on the main track it was all men working.

Did the numbers change while you were there?

No, I think it kept even-stevens, but you could see when women were accepted more to do more jobs. You'd see the odd one here and there type of thing, but it was mainly men when I left. I left in 1976; today it might be completely different altogether. The changes started coming, because when we were in the typing pool, no I wasn't, I was on the track, they started doing the computers and they needed the girls to do the punch cards for the wages, they were all picked from the office staff. They kept as much internal as they could, and they were trained, the girls for the punch room, to do that job and they were quite well paid. If anybody got married you'd just go to the punch room to get all those little pieces of punched card - cheap confetti!

There was a mix of skilled / semi-skilled and unskilled jobs?

Oh, definitely, even on the track. For men there were semi-skilled and skilled workers. There was stores as well - there were women working in the stores - not a lot, but there were women in the stores. In the machine shop it was all men, and different departments it was all men. I think even the paint shop it was all men.

Could people move from an unskilled to a skilled job?

If they got the proper training, I suppose they could train them up, but whether they stayed skilled or semi skilled I don't know. I think they might have had to have the qualifications too, but they were working alongside doing different jobs, you know what I mean. I should imagine a lot of them men, although semi-skilled, could do the job as the skilled really. They did have a good union there, I must admit, it was the Transport and General. They didn't bring us out on strike or anything, but they were very keen to help the employers get the best of what they could. They were very helpful and always kept on the good side of the bosses, they seemed to have a good working relationship. The union used to tell us if we could knock off on Christmas Eve early and they would get everybody ready, so when the factory buzzer

went everybody could go and everything was shut down just before – they weren't leaving anything running. Not a lot of work got done on Christmas Eve.

Were you offered training to help you with the job?

They trained you to what you want, they trained me on the Gestetner machine and they trained me in the office. I've just learnt different skills. Like when I went down to the repairs section, I was there in the time office doing the clock cards, writing all the bonuses for wages to do it. I did the front of the cards, but I didn't actually work the bonuses out, the main time clerks did that. That was another one that was mainly males doing that.

If it was short staffed and a 125 had had a flight test, they used to come and shout. If nobody wanted to go, they used to drag us out of the office and stick us on with our clock cards, so they wouldn't have clock cards to clock off.

Were there married women working there?

Yes, I got married when I was there. Although we were outnumbered by men, the men treated us with a lot of respect, they were really kind and gentlemen. I don't think you would get that nowadays – it's equality isn't it? But they really did us proud – they mothered us good and proper.

Were there any working mothers on the staff?

To be honest, if anyone did have children they had to make quite sure they didn't have too much time off. But it was very few and far between, they must have had teenagers to go back to work, because young children – they had no child minders then, did they? Unless they had someone to look after the children all the time, if the parents of married mums were willing to look after the children - that's ok, but they had to make quite sure. They weren't going to employ them if they were going to be off all the time with the children. You can understand that now, these days.

Were you encouraged to go to night school to further your education?

No.

Day release?

No, there was nothing like that. The apprentices, they had training and could go to college, but nobody else could. If they were going to train you they would train you in the factory, or around the factory, wherever.

[23' 30''] **4. Wages**

Can you remember how much you were paid a week?

I can't remember how much I ended up with, but it was quite good. It was quite high paid when I left in 1976, it was higher wages than normal, it was quite a high paid job compared to some (the same as Summers's, that was quite high paid as well), but to shop work that was

lower paid work, you were well paid. That's why everybody would prefer to go in there to work. Even the men got good wages, especially the skilled workers.

Did you have a pay rise at all? What was it? Why?

Every time they had pay rises everybody had a pay rise right the way through the factory. So the money went up quite terrifically and it kept up with the rate, they really were good on that. The only one I really knew was when the lads went overseas: if a plane broke down and they had to go out it – they had all the extras, the perks because they were away and things like that. The way they did the wages, not the ones in the offices because they had a fixed wage, but the men had a bonus and they had a certain amount of time to do the job, they had some percentage of that bonus if they did it a bit quicker – that's how they did it – on top of the wages, and especially if they did the overtime as well – it was time and a half or double time for different things.

Would you have had overtime?

Yes, I had plenty of overtime. I used to work Saturday mornings, which helped, especially being a teenage girl needing clothes and everything. Not much, but it's surprising how far it would go.

How were you paid?

Brown envelope, with the corner like cut off so you could count the notes and it had holes so you could slide the money around to see how much was in. The wages used to come down with security, with the wage girl or man from the wage office, and they used to stand at certain points and you'd come and they'd give you your wages. Your clock number was on them and they paid the wages on the shop floor. Nothing like banks and thing like that, so you felt rich going home.

What did you spend your wages on then?

Oh, daft things I suppose, records, clothes, 'cause it was all hot pants and mini skirts wasn't it? There used to be good shows on at the ABC in Chester, although it was a picture house, a lot of shows, top people came there: Cliff Richard, Gene Pitney, The Drifters, The Fourmost, you'd get all the top singers, so you'd pay for tickets to go there. Of course you went to discos and dancing at the weekend, you could spend your money. My pay packet had to go home and handed to my mum, and she took her share first, and then what was left was mine – that's how we always worked. Doesn't work like that these days.

Were there any perks for you?

Only aircraft flights; nothing really.

You got to go up in a 125?

Yes, when they came in they used to take things out so they had to be a certain weight to fly normally so they used to get people to sit in, to counteract the weight. So if they couldn't get

anybody they used to drag me out the office with my work. The boss knew where I was, the main one in charge of the hangar, (he was absolutely a terrific bloke) he'd say, oh go and get her out of the office, as long as she's doing the work up there – she can either do it up there or in the office – that was his attitude. Off I had to go with the test pilot, but it was good.

How far did you go?

I'm not quite sure, I never asked. I think we just went round, up to Scotland, down to London. You'd be up there an afternoon testing them. I know one day we went over Ireland, because he said it was Ireland below. Whether he was pulling my leg or not, I don't know. The big jet planes, they don't take long, do they? You can get to Germany in an hour on a jet plane, so you can just work out how far. All depended on what he wanted to test it to. Don't ask me where we'd been, we didn't actually land, we'd go down, but we wouldn't actually land unless we had to pick something up in Hatfield or somewhere else and we had to bring a part back with us. We wouldn't actually land, and then it was touch down and take off again. He'd shout, seat belt, they put the lights on, put everything away we're coming in to land. We'd put everything away and land. We were on first name terms with that pilot.

You said your aunt was on security, were they concerned about pilfering?

They were really on the ball about it. I don't know how much pilfering went on, but I never did, apart from the odd pen that sneaked into my bag because I forgot to take it out, but they weren't bothered about that. I don't know what they were looking for, but I should imagine there would be quite a lot of things worth money: there'd be copper and different things like that. If you had a workbag you could put anything in it, couldn't you? I think they just did spot checks. They would have to be secured because it was a big factory with a big airfield next door to it, so you never know. I don't think they'd walk across, but you could see it had to be secure. They've got security nowadays, and I think they have the same numbers, so it would be the same type of thing I think.

[31' 30''] **5. Trade Unionism**

You said there was a union in the factory?

Yes, the Transport and General Workers' Union. I don't think it's there now, I think it's Unite now.

That was for everybody?

Yes, everybody 'could join. You weren't forced to join the union, it was up to you whether you joined. I did, my dad told me to, in case I needed anything they were always there for you. There was very few who didn't join. It was only coppers, I think. They were very good there. I'm still in the same union, but it's not the same now; they don't seem to be as interested as they would be then. They had a shop steward, he didn't shout out everybody, you could go to him and he could negotiate to see if you could get a better arrangement on something. They would speak up for you; they were very very good, I must admit. They never shouted us out in all the time I was there (*strike*).

Were there any disputes or problems?

Oh, there was problems, but they always seemed to manage it with discussions and to be honest they always tried to get the best deal they could. They did the best that they could at the time. They were always there in the back, the shop stewards. They used to give us a ring on Christmas Eve to say, we've just heard, can you pass the word around the alarms will go at twelve o'clock. Everybody could go home then, and you got paid for the rest of the day – I liked that bit!

Did you feel the workers were treated fairly?

I did think they were fairly... all right it was long hours but they got paid for the hours like as normal. They didn't have the cushion, the way they are now, like health and safety (they've gone a bit overboard with it today), but there was hardly any accidents whatsoever. Everybody seemed to know what they were doing; they just got on with the job. I think there was only one major accident – somebody got his leg trapped – that I knew of all the time I was there, it was a sheer accident, nothing else. That's all I can remember of accidents and things like that. People were quite happy to go there and work; people were fighting to get in sometimes.

How did the workers get on with the supervisors or management?

They seemed to get on very well there. When I was there, they had meetings and they'd try to solve it. I think they were a listening factory.

Would you say that you admired, looked up to or feared the supervisors or managers or union reps?

No, like Gillbanks (he was the one I was looking after in the office) he ended up in the top job as the general manager of the factory. All of them had come up off the shop floor, so they knew what it was like to be the lowest of the low and that's what I liked about it – everybody came through the ranks. And they didn't have anybody that didn't know the job. I liked that bit and thought that was a fair way of doing it.

[35' 30''] **6. Conditions:**

Did you wear a uniform?

No.

Was the work dangerous in any way?

My job wasn't really dangerous; you just had to be careful going into places. But when you walked around the factory there was like pathways and they had to be clear and that was what you should have walked on all the time. If you were going across the track, you would have had airlines and god-knows what, so you had to be careful. If you had to go across the track, you had to have a reason to go across the track, because you should walk all the way round. If

you were looking for somebody you had to go across the track to find them, but you just took extra caution - that was the ruling.

Were there any particular injuries associated with the work that you'd accidentally get in the course of the day?

As I say, I can't remember any major injuries...

Something small that would happen?

Oh, you could cut your hand on a piece of metal or something like that, because you were dealing with metals. The men had riveting guns... they had a lovely surgery and I think there was three sisters there, on site. They were there for the night shift as well as the day shift. They had an ambulance there and that ambulance could go out through the factory gates, you didn't have to wait for anything to take you. I had a miscarriage and they took me from the factory in the ambulance to my own doctor, because they weren't a hundred per cent sure what to do. He sent me, in that ambulance, back to hospital. I lost the child, but that was not the point, it was nothing to do with the factory, but they treated me absolutely brilliantly. If you had a cut or some metal in your eye they would wash it out. It was like a mini health centre, they had everything there to treat until they could get them away. It was a lovely place there, it was like a little casualty place, and they had little cubicles for treating you. It was really good, I must admit. I don't know what other factories are like, I only worked at that one, but I thought it was absolutely brilliant at the time because it was really good. And they were qualified staff that were looking after you.

In all the time you were there, there was only the one accident?

Yes that I remember. Well, it could have happened more it was a big factory, accidents might have happened and I wouldn't have known about it, little things like that, but very little.

Can you remember any of the rules and regulations?

Well, there were certain rules and you had to stick to them. It was more common sense than stupidity, that type of thing. Common sense came over. They weren't little Hitlers, you've got to do this. But if you did something wrong, they would point it out to you in a polite way, second time you did it you might get a bit more, but they drilled it in for your own good. They were all rules like don't run on the track always walk, never run in the factory if you can help it, but on the walkway you might walk a bit quicker. Just look out for anything coming on wheels. I can't remember what they were called, they were like little cabs with trucks on supplying the lines and things like that, but they were on the walkway so you had to be careful. But it was more common sense than rules.

Were you ever made aware of health and safety issues?

Not really there, but you know when you're doing wrong, and to be honest as I said, they would tell you don't do this if it was too dangerous. Like if you were in the department they

had tanks dipping in acid (I can't think what the department was called now) but you had to wear their proper clothing 'cause it would burn your clothing never mind your hands, and things like that. They were warned – great big signs everywhere. The rules were there, and people should take notice of them.

Was there any health and safety people?

I didn't see any, but it was just signs warning people like that. I don't think health and safety was there then like it is today. It was there to a certain extent for your own good, like with the rules, but they were only rules they weren't people saying you've got to do this, type of thing.

The factory, was it heated, well lit?

No. The factory was very well lit, but heated, no. They did have heaters now and again on the floor, but it was so massive. At one stage, I think it was one of the biggest roof spans in the country, it was a whopping (it still is) ... to heat that would take a lot, but they did have heaters now and again there. In the offices they were heated because they had like pipe work going through, underground piping to get the heating to you. On the main factory they usually had overalls and things, and heaters now and again, but no. If you're in an aircraft I should imagine it's claustrophobic, they'd be quite warm in there anyway. Being a factory, the only time they would lose the heat would be when they'd throw the flight shed doors open and all the heat would go out then. It would be a waste of money.

Was it an issue for people?

I don't really know, because I was in the office, I might have been selfish on this one, but they just had extra jackets and things on.

Did they have facilities like toilets, changing rooms and washing, things like that?

They didn't have changing rooms, but we had plenty of toilets all round the factory, the ladies toilets – there must have been thirty odd toilets. They had cleaners there three times a day cleaning them and they were always spotless, didn't matter which ones you went in. Of course, you had toilets in the main block too.

And similar facilities for men?

I should imagine, yes. They had cleaners to do theirs as well. They were well looked after. They never ran out of anything as far as I was aware, you didn't have to ask for anything at all there. There were towels, they weren't paper towels, they weren't dryers, but they were changed three times a day to make sure you didn't have wet hands. They were very good.

Did they play music when people were working?

No.

Was it very noisy on the factory floor?

Yes, because of drills and rivet guns and different things and all the machinery. Yes, it was quite noisy, but you didn't really notice quite how noisy it was. I know that might sound daft, but you didn't. You weren't actually shouting, the noise was there, but you didn't take that much notice. If I had to pass on a message from the boss to one of the foremen, he could understand what I'm saying without shouting.

Did they need ear protectors there?

Yes, they did have ear protectors. On some jobs they definitely did, they needed them. If you've ever heard a rivet gun go, it's like a noisy woodpecker; you knew what they were doing. I never hung around while they were doing it.

Were you allowed to chat while you worked?

Oh yes, you could chat as long as you did the work you could chat; they were very fair. If the work was there, you had to do it, but if you'd done all you had to do you could chat then. If you were waiting for something to come, you could chat to somebody, you know. Just the way it is.

Were people allowed to smoke while working?

I think they were allowed to smoke in the breaks only. I'm not quite sure because I don't smoke; I didn't really take that one up. I think they were only allowed to smoke in the break, because they didn't have smoke breaks, only the tea breaks at set times when they blew the hooters and everybody had their tea breaks. On the counters where they used to put the wages and different things, the canteen girls would have urns of tea and you could have sausage rolls and cake for tea brakes – they'd bring them down to you. There wasn't a lot, you had to be among the first in the queue... nine times out of ten it was money you couldn't really afford all the time like it is today, so you only did that as a luxury. I used to do that on a Saturday morning - that was my treat.

Do you think you've suffered any long term effects on your health from working there?

No, not really. To be honest, it was an experience I would never forget. It was a happy working environment, everybody seemed to get on. It was the way it was.

How did the women workers treat fellow male workers in the factory – did they tease them or harass them?

Oh yes, they'd laugh and joke with them, but there was no... when they laughed and joked it was just jokes, it wasn't like it is today you could take offence at, you know what I mean?

How did the men feel about it?

The men treated the women as ladies, that's the only way to think of it. They were proper gentlemen, the older ones, especially to the younger ones. You felt like you were treasured, well, the ones I worked with anyway. I felt like I had a million dads looking after me. They made quite sure that I didn't get up to too much mischief.

You said you were married there – how did your husband view your employment – was he supportive?

Well to be honest, yes. I met him when I was working there. He didn't work there, he worked in British Steel. When I was courting him, and then I got married, it was an extra wage coming in, that's how it worked until I had to pack in. Then I had my first child and I stayed at home for a while; then I had Wendy; then I started working for Flintshire County Council.

Did he help you with work in the home while you were working?

Yes, it was brilliant that, because I was eight till five, Dave worked shifts, it was great then. He worked the three shifts: night, afternoons and mornings, so at sometime in the day he was there when I wasn't. Sometimes he'd put the washing machine on, or make a pan of stew and he's had his before going in at dinner time and I could have mine at tea time and different things like that. If he could nip out to the butcher's and get the shopping, he used to do that because it was butchers not big shops then was it, like it is now. It helped a lot, even if it was all the washing done, you had to get it out because you didn't have tumble dryers or things like that, but it was a big help.

[49' 50''] **7. Hours / Holidays**

How many days a week did you work?

I worked five days a week, Monday to Friday but Bank Holidays off, but I did work Saturday mornings as overtime, if I wanted to – it was up to me.

How many hours a day was that?

I started at nine and finished at five o'clock. You had time for tea break in the morning, dinner break and a tea break in the afternoon; that was deducted out of the hours.

Did you work shifts?

No.

Did you clock in and clock off?

Yes, clock off, clock on, and if you went out of the factory dinner time, you had to clock out.

And they paid you the overtime rate?

Yes, whatever it was at the time.

You said there was a canteen there, did you have to pay for your meals?

Yes, we did have to pay for meals. They did a meal for like...I don't think everybody went there because they could never cope with the amount of people there, but it was there if people needed it for a meal. With the time to get there and get back to where you were, well where we were on Repair and Overhaul section, it was right on the other side of the airfield. You'd be travelling up the airfield and travelling back, you didn't have time to eat your meal

then. We didn't bother with that at all. I know it was hot meals there, and it was quite good value if you got there, but I never used it so I couldn't tell you. Even as a mail girl I never went there, as I went in there I could smell it cooking. There was a library there as well, where you could have library books. They had a social club as well if you wanted to go there at night.

What was your annual holiday allowance, was that with pay?

Yes, but it had close-down week: the last in July and the first in August, they shut the works. So whatever time after that was yours, but that was the shut-down weeks. I think they've altered that now, but they shut the factory down for that time.

You'd only have days for the rest of the year?

Yes, when I first started they had shut-down weeks and you had to take them ten days, but you still had days to go away. Towards the end, just before we left, I think it did change then; you could take them when you wanted. I think it works like that now, but it never used to. I think some departments still shut down, but don't quote me on that one.

Did you go on holiday?

Yes, I did. Just before we got married, the girls, about five of us, all saved up like mad – it took us over twelve months nearly eighteen months to save – we went abroad for the first time us five girls together. We had a marvellous time, we went to Majorca. It took a lot of organising, it was only a week. Anybody would have thought they were giving us the moon.

Would you have been allowed days off for personal reasons?

Dentist, you had to be careful, but they didn't stop money out of your wage for dentist – they classed it as medical – but they would query it if you had too many. Funerals, it close family, and I never worked out how close the family was. Close family is close family isn't it?

Would that be docked from your pay.

No, it was called compassionate leave, but you could only have a few days, it wasn't long. My mum died while I was there, I don't think they docked my pay. I went home that day, they phoned to say my mum was dying, to get home as quick as I can. They found transport for me to get home, they got me there in time, bless them. As I said, it was a good firm to work for. I came back in, they buried them quick them days didn't they – quicker than they do now. So I came back in, I'm pretty sure I wasn't docked the money. I didn't miss the money so I mustn't have been stopped it.

[55' 45''] **8. Travel to work**

How did you get to work?

On the Crossville bus, a double-decker – the old fashion ones with the open door on the back – with a conductor. Because it was a works bus, the driver and conductor were roughly the

same people every morning, they knew where everyone got on and off, so if you were running late they'd stop the bus to see what direction you were coming from, so they wouldn't miss you. Especially youngsters like me.

Was it far to go?

Buckley to Broughton is not that far really.

The catchment's area you said was huge?

It was massive. I know they had lads from Liverpool, because I worked with them. I definitely know they were from Liverpool.

And into North Wales?

From Rhyl anyway, I don't know how the Rhyl lads got in. But there were those from Liverpool, they had to get up really early to get in; they used to start out about six o'clock or something to get in.

What time were you starting out?

My bus came at 7 o'clock in the morning; unless you got a lift, you were lucky then.

[57' 10''] **9. Social Life**

You said there were social activities there, were they organised by the workers?

It was a social club, it was run by a manager of the social club, it was like a bar and you could go there after work, and they had dos there in the evening. We never bothered with it. It was for the older folks then.

Were there any Christmas dances, Christmas parties?

No, we never went to any. The only thing, they had an open day once a year and that was what the programmes were for.

Were there any Sports clubs?

That was the sports club, and they had sports there like netball and things like that, teams, but you did that outside in your own time. I think they had bowls, I think they had cricket for the lads. I don't think there was any football or anything like that.

You said there was a social club?

That's where all the activities were run from, he would organise the clubs and things like that.

Did you pay towards that?

Yes, if you wanted to be a member; it wasn't that much. You had to get there, transport there and back and if you were drunk it was a bit too far to walk from Broughton to Buckley.

You didn't participate in activities?

No, because we were only teenagers; it was more the older ones. I think the ones more living in Broughton used to a bit more, because it was handy for them

Was there any one event you remember in particular from your time in the factory? A visit by a famous person or anything like that?

Not really. There were MPs and things like that, but I can't even remember. They were always going round, but no, no famous person. The jockeys on Chester Races Day used to land on the airfield and you could see the planes landing, we knew they were jockeys, but we didn't know who they were. So if there was anybody famous on those planes we hadn't got a clue.

[59' 50''] **10.** *Did you enjoy working at the factory?*

Oh yes I did, I must admit, I did. I think I'd still be there today if I didn't have to have leave, you know what I mean. If it altered I might have left by now, but you don't know do you? If it wasn't meant to be, it wasn't meant to be.

And you decide to leave – you had to leave?

I had to leave, no choice. When you were six months pregnant, that was the time you had to go.

You couldn't go back either?

You could if you had somebody to look after the child, but you would have had to apply for your job again. Your job would go because you'd left the factory, you couldn't go back.

How long did you work there?

I went there at sixteen and left at twenty six, ten years.

What did you do afterwards?

Looked after my children for a while and then I went and got a job with the Council, and that's what I'm still doing.

Are you in contact with any of your former workmates?

Yes, I'm still in touch with Pauline, she started the same day as me, as I said before. I do see other ones now and again, it is now and again – it's usually Christmas cards. One of the bosses from the time office, he still sends me a Christmas card; he must be well into his eighties, he still sends me a card every Christmas, and the girls.

Looking back now – how do you feel about the time you spent working there?

Oh yes, happy memories. Let's face it, planes come and go, don't they, but I met a lot of happy memory people there. It was a good place to work. No complaints on that one, no. I had some good right giggles, you know.

That's a lovely place to end. Thank you very much for sharing your memories.

Duration : 1 hour