

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

**Denex, Tredegar (aka Harvey's and Clifford Williams)
Smiths – Rhymni**

Interviewee: VSE002.2 Sonia Gould

Date: 8/11/2013

Interviewer: Catrin Edwards for Woman's Archive of Wales/ ar
ran Archif Menywod Cymru

CE: Could you tell me your name and your date of birth?

SG: Sonia Gould, the 19 June 194.

CE: Can you tell us a little about your background you know where you were born, your father and mother?

SG: I was born in Cardiff and we came up to Tredegar when I was 12. I have two sisters, I married when I was 25 and then I had three sons.

CE: What about your mother and father what did they do?

01:02

SG: My father was an electrician in the factory – he used to do all the boilers. He practically lived in work all the time and my mother was a sewing machinist as well. We lived outside the factory gates cos we came up from Cardiff because we have a prefab with the job - it went with the job, and now my father came up to do the.. mend the machines as electrician and my mother worked as well, and then when I left school at 15.

CE: So can you tell me about education, primary and secondary?

SG: I went to Severn Road in Cardiff and when we.. I was in Cardiff I went to Kitchener Road and that was a secondary modern so when we moved up here I went to a secondary modern up here – Glanhwy.

CE: And then when did you leave school and..

02:10

SG: I left school at 15 because I had a job waiting for me in the factory cos on a Saturday morning I used to go with my father and he trained me on the machines because they were buttonhole, bartack, overlocking - all the specials. I could use the flat machine as well and I was on the line.

CE: How did you feel about leaving school early?

02:42

SG: Oh I dont mind – I didn't like school at all. I wasn't very good at school and because of my accent coming up here, they used to make fun of you cos you was talking different, and I'm short and they was making fun of that, but there was bullying in them days but I just wanted to work and have money, and it wasn't much money.

CE: Right. So how did you feel then about going to the factory - was that okay?

03:14

SG: Yeah my mother was there and my father and it was like.. cos we lived outside the gates, you only have to walk up. They had a hooter going – they'd make the hooter go and then you go into factory. The hooter would go about eight o'clock and then you had to be in there - you know - different to today. But because we were right outside, you walked into work.

CE: Do you remember how you got the job?

03:44

SG: Through my father. I went to work, my father got me the job and they come up to me, the union woman did and she said "I'm awful sorry love, you've got to go home" and I said "Why have I got to go home?" and she said "because they're shouting up on the floor because they're laying people off and they've started you... and it's not on." So I went to the office to the boss and he said "Sonia.." he said "I can't.. I got to dismiss you, but I promise you I'll have you back in six weeks - and he did. But I had to go home. I was crying on the doorstep cos I could see the factory they were all going back to work and I had to stay in and I'd only just started! But he did have me back to his word he said yeah, and I went back after six weeks. But they was going to walk out on strike if they didn't sack me - they were – because.. because he'd been laying people off they didn't think why the electrician's daughter should have been starting work.

CE: So did that carry or were they ok to you afterwards?

05:10

SG: No they were alright – it was just they didn't think it was fair. They striked over a lot of things they did – we run the factory really we did. If we couldn't have the radio on they'd strike, and if it was too cold they'd go out on strike. They just wanted to rule the place. One time we was out on strike, all the machines would go off and you'd think "What's up? Everybody's shut he machine off?" and "All out, all out!" and we'd all have to go over the canteen. But this one day we all walked out and he locked us behind the gates – he locked us out! (she laughs). But they was only something trivial, I think it was only... you know... But at Christmas time we'd work until 12 and then we would have a drink and take bottles of drink in, well by 1 o'clock we was all sloshed... (she laughs) in the factory with all the trimmings hanging up and we used to have Elvis and Cliff Richards on our machines and... it was like rivalry like - I'm an Elvis fan and then a Cliff Richards fan would be at the side of you... but it was.. on a line it was very very good and then you'd go ut the toilet and have a cigarette and sit on the floor but you'd have about quarter of an hour before you'd have to come back in then. But supervisors were very kind they were – they was good. But once I done the button holing of the fly of the trousers, I could my way back up the line. And then i'd go out to toilet and came back in and catch up again. But that was the type of thing it was like... you... well we were all jolly together we loved it.

CE: Let me ask you.. we haven't talked about the name of the factory and I'd like to go back to when you were there – what it felt like what you remember from those first days after you went back – after the six weeks?

7:23

Well I went back and there was this supervisor – I don't think she like me very much – but she used to give me little pieces of material to practice on and they were called patches. They hang on jackets with the buttons on them and then you'd have to do about 100 for about a shilling you know – it was hard work because you were on piece work and em.. I didn't like that very much. well then I went to the union woman and I said to her "I can't earn my money on those patches ", so I was moved then and I went on to buttonholing on the line.

CE: So when you were doing the patches, was that a kind of training then?

8:11

SG: No - that was just a job putting buttons on material. It was only squares. Well the money wasn't there and you want piecework, so you had to so many and I didn't like it I wanted to be on the buttonhole machine. But... it was... well as I said you got into it like isn't it, but everybody knew me through my parents like.

CE: Did you get any training though?

SG: Only with my father... on a Saturday morning. I used to go up the factory... he'd be working on a Saturday morning and he'd put me on the machines and train me. But

other people.. if you got a job, you got a supervisor working with you and showing you the machines. But I was already qualified before I went in there.

CE: So the factory was called...?

9:09

SG: Denex... denex factory, because when I used to go up and I was in school, my father used to be working and they were making children's clothes, coats and bonnets and all things like that, cos we used to wear the clothes... but when Harvey's I think it was. Harvey's come and took over from Denex and they were donkey jackets and duffel coats, and they went for a couple of years doing that, then they sold out to Clifford Williams and Son.

CE: What kind of clothes did Denex do?

SG: Children's clothes.

CE: What did Clifford Williams do then?

9:56

SG: They done donkey jackets and trousers and jackets.

CE: So while you were there the whole production changed?

SG: Yeah.. but on buttonholing and overlocking and the specials like.. you would same work. But you had to earn your money. You'd have to do like over time and that. I think... well I had £5 for a week.

CE: I'll just take you back.. when your father took you there did you have to have an interview or anything or did they just give you the job?

SG: No – they gave me the job because I was always up there with my father anyway. And the bosses like Mister White and that, knew me.

CE: Did you enjoy the work in the factory then?

SG: Oh yes. We run it. (she laughs). I left for a week.. I was getting a bit fed up and if they were striking my mother would say “Sit down! Your not striking with them” and I thought Oh – she said “No you'll look bad on your father – stay where you are.” But I went over to Rhymni – that's over the mountain - to Smiths and they were a sewing factory and I went for a week and I had bus sickness and I couldn't stick it. You wasn't allowed to talk because Denex ruined you for working anywhere else so I (worked) my week in hand and come back (she laughs)... I come back! I didn't like Smiths - it was too... so different to our factory. They were very very strict. You had to put your hand up

to go to toilet and you wasn't allowed to talk to the girl next to you, which our factory was totally different to that. No...

CE: So at Denex.. do you think they were good employers?

11:55

SG: Very good.

CE: Did your work change over the years from when you began?

SG: No. We were always looking on jackets and you know. It's so funny because they'd start on the line by here and by the time they got down to the bottom of the line, there was two jackets missing and nobody know where they went, isn't it. Oh – they were taking parts so when they'd go home they'd sew them up... and make a jacket up when they'd go home you know? But that went on... I mean that went on... people knew... and cotton reels – you were allowed to take cotton reels home. You could have the cotton reels you know, they never stopped you... I mean nobody done a lot of pinching, but you could have a reel of white cotton if you wanted it like... you.. they didn't stop you doing that, you know. I think I've got some reels here from the factory. But... you know it wasn't.. as I said they were pretty lenient with us and we had a canteen where we had food, you go and have food... (phone rings)

CE: What was it like the sights and the smells of the place? Can you describe the factory to me?

13:31

SG: We had chalk... we used to chalk... you had to mark your garment, so the chalk and everything... the smell of all the cottons and that... because all the alleyways around the lines were all like fluff, so you had a lot of fluff with.. with the pieces of material. They had a big cutting room they did, and that cutting room... they done layers and layers of material.... They had like ban (?) knives - they were very long knives and like you had big things like that, that you pushed through the ban knife and they cut hundreds of patterns out in one go w...(?) before they came on the line, and that was called the cutting room. Well there was about 12 people working in there... and... before it came out on the floor. But it did smell like... how can I explain... like fluffy material... I mean you expect... I don't know.... the fluff was everywhere , cos you had it all in your clothes and your hair.... especially on the duffel coats cos they were thick material and...

CE: Was it a good smell?

SG: Yeah... you were used to it. You'd go in in the morning and it was just.... well you got used to it.

CE: Did you wear any protection on your...?

15:05

SG: No.

CE: Do you think you should have?

SG: I think we should have – especially working on that fluffy stuff like isn't it, cos when you pressed your button on your buttonhole, I mean that was going round like that doing the buttonhole, well the fluff was coming up onto your face and... but they never thought of things like that in them days did they?

CE: No they didn't...

SG: Cos we had silks - for the lining of the jacket you had silk and they were all.. that was all fluffy and threading. All the threads was all on the floor... from into the cuttings and that... but... and trousers you didn't think... but the duffel coats was the worst you know.

CE: Was the condition of the factory... did it feel clean?

15:59

SG: Oh yes - they had cleaners. They had cleaners going round in... when you left work, that cleaners would come in and sweep... they'd sweep all of fluff - you wouldn't have yesterday's bits and bobs all on the floor - that would be gone. And they had a cleaner in the toilets - the toilets was clean but... One day, one girl – somebody threw a cotton reel at her and she had lock jaw. They threw it across the factory on to the other line and she had lock jaw. But... you would fool about... you could fool about - they didn't... they didn't stop you like isn't it, and they'd shout over and you know.... and you had like Cilla Black playing over on the radio, and it was that loud we'd all be singing to Cilla Black.

CE: Do you remember what the programmes were.... and do you remember what the songs were?

SG: Yeah it was... Your My World with Cilla Black - it was all the 50s music you know... and it was all records cos they had a record machine up the office and it used to play all the records or you'd bring your own records in and they'd play them for you. You could... you could do that. But... you went in relays to the canteen, like... say 12.30 your line would go and then 1 o'clock another line would go, so... you know... you could have hot meal, or you could have sandwiches and tea and that... and they had a boiler house... well the boiler house used to make all the heating you know, cos my father... there was a man working in the boiler house from over the valley, but... we didn't take any notice of the smell. I think Denex smelt Denex like - it was a factory. Yeah - you accepted that. And if you was getting married they'd tie you to the machine with all

things on you. If you was getting married... they'd done that to me and I was nearly dying - my mother and father with there, but... it was... it was the best place – we all say now even though we're in our 70s – we wish it was open and it was still going.... cos we meet up - all the girls in Tredegar – we see them... and they do go “Haia!” like that. They're like sisters they are – cos we had that bond you know like... we went in the toilet one day and this girl pierced my ears with a needle.... and soap (she laughs) But you know I was only about 17 and I was bleeding from my ear... but... no, it was a good place to work. The companionship was there, because this one girl from Rhymni was going to beat my friend up isn't it, and then there were about 10 waiting for her outside. They wouldn't have touched her like... they were that close... they would gang up with you, you know – they wouldn't have it.

CE: Your mum was there, your dad was there – did you go there with girls from school?

SG: Yeah – and girls who lived around the factory.... in the streets. Cos once the hooter would go, they'd come from all the streets around... you know. And they had a little 2 shops... two little shops at the bottom of the road, and that's where you'd get your sweets or whatever for dinner and then the hooter would go and you'd be going.. walking back. But it was about 300 people there.

CE: Were you mainly women or women and men?

19:51

SG: Women and men but the men were more or less in the cutting room... and they had supervisor men on the presses, cos we had automatic big presses to press the.. the jackets and that.. and they were overseeing the presses... the men.

CE: So how many women say to men do you think?

20:17

SG: I would say there would only be about 40 men and all the rest was women.

CE: So hundreds of women?

SG: Oh yeah.. yeah.

CE: Did Tredegar women go and work anywhere else?

SG: Yeah – some wen to the bra factory in Ebbw Vale - Berlei's and a lot went over Smith's to that sewing factory in Rhymni. Some didn't come to Denex, they just went to Smith's you know, or... when that day I went looking for a job I went over Triang in Merthyr – that was Triang toys - that was a big factory over there. But I didn't get a job over there.

CE: So you could walk to work then.

SG: Yeah. I could see the factory like.. the factory was like those houses over there.. it was only the distance of looking.. the factory – I was looking at it every day.

CE: And was that ok?

SG: Yeah - That's why I wanted a brick when it broke.. (?) Well it was lovely, it was lovely, but it was turned into a... I mean it was shut for a long time.. years... and then this other firm took over and they were making plastic balls – they took it over the LCR did. But... as I say I got amrried and I never went back there but my mother and father stayed there – they worked until it closed.

CE: When they did children's clothes where is those clothes go?

SG: They went to London, Burton on Trent ... cos my father was driving the van and when we were little we went in the van with him and he'd take us to Burton on Trent, or we'd stay in London or different places he'd be delivering. They'd all be hanging on rails in the back of the van. It was a massive van mind – the size of two houses. Big van with Donald Duck on there and Mickey Mouse.

CE: Do you know what shops they went to?

22:37

SG: No.

CE: What about the duffles and the donkey jackets – where di they go?

SG: I don't know. We just used to see them packed up in boxes you know. But like this one supervisor, she – Bidy – she done a whole section of jackets and the buttonholes... wel she'd made a mistake on the on the form and she had the sack, cos she'd done a whole range wrong, and they sacked her – I remember that. She did something different to the sheet.

CE: Were the union unhappy about that?

SG: No – the union didn't interfere but.. one time when I was working I went up the office and he said that I could have a shilling... a shilling for about a dozen I think it was. And I came home and I said to my mother "I'm having a shilling for a dozen.." I said "I'll earn some money" isn't it. Well when I went back to work this new woman come on and she say "He's not giving you a shilling – you can have nine pence." That was 6d and 3d wasn't it – "you can have it for 9d". "No" I said "he didn't day 9d in the office". So she took me up the office and I said to him "No you didn't", I said "cos I went home and I told my mother and father I was excited with what you've given me." I said "you

didn't give me 9d." I didn't back down, and you know, he just went like that (she makes gesture) I said "No..." cos he knew I could have earned o good bit of money on piece work doing that – for a shilling. But no he didn't change his mind. but I mean I went up with the union woman on her own because she was a very good union woman, but I didn't tell fibs and I didn't think "Oh – its' the boss isn't it" – I just told the truth you know and I said "No - your not backing me down", because... but then he realised what he'd given me that I could have earned a good bit of money.

(Chat about DOB and when SG went to work.)

CE: Were there lots of married women working with you?

25:50

SG: Yes.

CE: So they could stay on?

SG: Stay on.

CE: When did you get married?

SG: I got married in 1966, then I had Lee then and I didn't work again.

CE: So you finished?

SG: Finished. My mother and father still worked there though.

CE: Were you encouraged to do nightclass or anything when you were there?

SG: No. My sister did – she was in the office and she done shorthand and typing – she was in the office there. But no - when you finished work you was too tired you know.

CE: Do you think they encouraged people in the office to do nightclass more?

SG: No – I think I'mglad that no and 50 cal than your two personal I think my sister actually learnt to drive - I never did, but she.. she went to night school on her own accord to do typing and shorthand, which she don't use now - shorthand – but she don that on her own back, she did – she went to night school... but no, I think everybody went to the factory didn't... well they wanted to just earn money... cos, well we were all happy and you had your wages at the end of the week and... you didn't think of being more educated, cos you done your job, you knew what you was doing, cos there was nobody could tell you "Oh you're not doing that right", because you were trained and you knew exactly what... if they'd sent you over on another line, you knew what you was doing. You knew the trousers from the very beginning – the belt and everything, all of the pieces joined together and then you know, you'd swap around day –

they'd send me over there doing buttonholing on the duffels, or they'd send me on the trouser line doing the flies, and all the pieces would come down the line, well then you'd do it like, cos I was a floater, I mean they called them floaters then.

CE: And what did that mean?

28:16

SG: Well you'd float all around the factory. As I said, if they wanted you over there, you'd go over there doing buttonholing and then you'd come back and you'd go by here and you'd put buttons on trousers and that. so I was a floater I was.

CE: So you could do everything.

SG: Everything.

CE: Did you do any cutting out?

SG: No.

CE: That was just the men?

SG: That's the men. Cos Islwyn, he worked down the ban knife, and it was a big knife that was.

CE: Who's Islwyn?

SG: Islwyn, Islwyn Evans...

CE: Just a friend?

SG: Yeah, he was my neighbour and he lived in the prefab as well, and he was employed just doing the ban knife. But your talking about a big bundle you know – cutting it once. Cos he used to push the material through the ban knife, cos the knife would be coming down at a rate, to go through all them materials in a pile.

CE: What's a ban knife?

SG: It's a big knife that goes around and around and the knife would be that long and the material would be like that .

CE: About two foot...

SG: Yeah – two foot and he'd be pushing it through the knife. The knife would be cutting just like that – like sheer down to cut the patters out. But he'd have to chalk all the patters out cos I used to go on talking to him in the cutting room... cos you could...if

you wanted cottons and that you'd have to go up to the store – they had a store with all the cottons and buttons if you were short of them, then you'd go and get them and you could say “Haia Islwyn” and go and talk to him on the ban knife, but you know the supervisors was pretty lenient, they were.

CE: So it was quite hard physical work then – to cut?

SG: Oh on the ban knife – it would be for him. But I mean, he was only one doing it.

CE: What I'm asking really, because you say all the men were the cutters, was it too hard for the women...?

SG: Oh they wouldn't give them them jobs..

CE: No... but why, was it because you weren't...?

SG: Because of the knife. I mean it was danger... it was dangerous work, because that knife would be going all the time like... very sharp you know and it would be going very fast to cut all that material in a big bulk. I think there were only two cutters anyway – Islwyn and this other fella. There was only two doing it for the whole factory. But the boys working in the cutting room – they'd be laying out the material ready for.. to cut, and drawing the pattern on the material, you know cos they had tweeds, ordinary jacket material, oh it was a lot of... and that was a lot of fluff – the cutting part – cutting all that material – that was fluffing...

CE: So you say you left when you got married and had children – were there any working mothers in the factory, and if there were, were there any child minding facilities or creche?

31:52

SG: No. Cos I had friends that had children and... like Janet Price – her mother had the little boy. The grandmothers had the children or it was in the house ... they never had minding. If they went to the nursery, some people did go back to work with the nursery and that, but I didn't work again. Cos.. we came down to live down here then when I got married – I had a big white wedding – but no.. I think a lot went back to work and just families minded the children.

CE: Was that because they had to do you think?

SG: Yeah – because the factory didn't have its own creche. Because we used to have Christmas parties in the canteen, and all of children used to go to Christmas parties.

CE: Yes – Paul (SG's son) said that.

SG: Yeah and we had dances in the canteen on a Saturday night - they'd have a factory dance.

CE: I'll ask you about that now then – about the social life.

SG: Oh right. Yeah - in Tredegar we had a big Queens Ballroom, and everybody went there - everybody – they'd come from everywhere. and it was a big ballroom and we'd all meet up – “are you going to the Queens tonight?” “Yeah”. Well we'd all go the Queens – that's where we met our husbands, half of us, but if they were having a factory dance, well you'd go in... you'd have to pay to go in – they's charge you about £1 to go in, but you know when it was a carnival, well I'd organise a carnival. One time, my father helped me mind, we had a big lorry from the factory, and we had all the machines on the lorry and we'd done the Rag Trade – remember that years ago – The Rag Trade, and I was the one with the net and the pinny, what was her name, I can't think of her name in the Rag Trade...

CE: Miriam Karlin

SG: Was it?... and the men came on, on the lorry cos they were supervisors, and my father... we had about six machines on the lorry - overlocking machines and that – and we didn't win the carnival but it was good – the rag trade. And then we'd done St Trinians...

CE: Going back to the Rag Trade, do you remember what she used to say... Miriam Karlin?

34:32

SG: Everybody out! You know cos we had permission my father... as they said they had to get the machines on the lorry, cos it was a big long lorry like. And then we done the St Trinians. We all dressed up with big holes in our tights and that, and we had lollipops and we's St Trinians. And then we'd done concerts in the canteen then, on the stage. And half the girls was tight, by the time we.. we was doing the can can and that you know. But half of them like i'nit, they was... we'd enjoy that.

35:14

CE: So was it Denex that arranged the dances or did you.. the workers?

SG: No It was Clifford Williams then. It was sort of three.. Denex.. well as I said, Denex handed it over to Harveys and then from Harveys to Clifford Williams and that's when it closed was Clifford Williams.

CE: So do you remember how long these three different companies were there?

SG: No...

CE: So...

SG: But it was always called Denex...

CE: For you..

SG: For everybody. Like they never changed their... You worked in Denex and that... cos you would see the thing... it was all Denex like.

CE: It was the factory then... they arranged the dances and the concerts and things...

SG: Well we had like a social committee you know... a social side whereas you had people you know what would arrange things like that, you know. And you had practice in the canteen on the stage before you put the show on you know. And it was good. We done the Temperance Seven. Remember them?

CE: Yes...

SG: And we were all in Black and White and had instruments you know. No - I think it was a different factory compared to those other strict ones, because they.. they well.. the bosses were English though. They wasn't Welsh. One was in Newport cos we went when ? wasn't working.. I was only a young girl... and we went to stay with them in Newport... my father.... they didn't have no children and my sister and myself went down there to stay in Newport. And they had us for a week. But em.. no I think every boss we had was English.

CE: Did you see the bosses often?

SG: Yeah. Walk around the factory floor. So they were around in the factory, they weren't in a different place?

CE: In the office, but in the day they was overseeing all the work. They were walking around the factiry... Yeah.

SG: You could say hello to them, you know.

CE: And you felt they wer quite lenient.

SG: Yeah. Mr Boocock... oh yeah they was very lenient. I don't know whether they wanted to keep the peace, but we just did what we wanted to like.

CE: Xan you remember how much you were paid?

SG: £5! For the week.

CE: When you started?

SG: Yeah.

CE: And di your wages go up?

SG: No. The most I ever earned I think was £6 bringing home.

CE: That was good money in the 50s was it? £5?

SG: Well it wasn't... yeah it was really cos you get a weekly shop for £5 couldn't you? A week's shopping. Cos I remember my mother used to go shopping for £5 and you'd have all the food in the cupboard you know. Cos I used to hand my money over - my mother wouldn't let me board - so I had to hand my wages over to her. She'd buy me a top or something then or... she wouldn't give me pocket money. But you had to hand your wages over.

CE: So you didn't get pocket money from your mum?

SG: No my mother was very strict.

CE: Were you all paid the same do you think?

SG: No. No. There was good earners there and they were - they'd take home about £13. Em... - the piecework - it's all according to what you were on. But I never took a big wage home. I mean other girls they were... if I'd done overtime I'd stay there til 8 in the night, well then I'd have overtime money then. And a Saturday morning. You could earn that extra by going in on a Saturday morning.

CE: Were there any perks working in the factory... like were there any clothes that you wanted to buy or could buy or was it all nothing you were interested in?

SG: No. No.

CE: You started talking about trade unions - could you tell me what the union was called?

SG: It was Tailor and Garment workers' it was. Cos we had a little badge with a scissors on there. And we used to have union meetings. They'd hold it in the canteen, well then you'd go into the canteen and then you'd be told all about the union and what was going on in other factories and they'd say what was happening, and then they'd call us into the canteen to discuss what was goin on in our factory. Like for instance like saying what they were going to do, how they were going to lay people off, em about the last strike, why did you strike and that. But they did have union meetings.

CE: And did you have to be a member of the union?

SG: Mm

CE: And was that ok? Did you like being a member of the union?

SG: Yeah, because they took money out your wages once a week - it wasn't very much, but when you joined the factory you had to join the union. You didn't have a choice. You wasn't asked do you want to in the union or no, you just had to be in there.

CE: And were you happy with that?

SG: Yeah. Because they stood by you if you wanted... like I had this dispute about my wage and that money, well Winnie Griffiths, everybody liked her, well they all go to her. You'd see em going to her on her machine and then she'd take them up the office and have the dispute out about that.

CE: And who was Winnie Griffiths?

SG: Winnie Griffiths was the union lady.

CE: The shop steward?

SG: Yes the shop steward.

CE: And she was good was she?

SG: Yeah - very good - oh aye.

CE: Was she the shop steward all the time you...?

SG: All the time. And you had supervisors but the supervisors like... if you were promoted to a supervisor you didn't sit down on the machine you were walking and looking at the work. I wasn't made supervisor because I was doing all the machines like. I mean I was bar tacking one day, then I'd go on buttonholing, then I'd go on overlocking. The overlocking is like overlocking... you know like that... like overlocking... you know...?

CE: Yes. Like at the end of the material. Every material's overlocked to stop it fraying. Then you'd go on the button machine, putting buttons on the jacket... press your foot look and it would go dddddddduh... and it would sew the button on. And you had buttons on the jacket cuff. So that you'd be putting buttons on the cuff, and on the front and they had like metal hooks on the buttons. But em... I loved it I did.

43:16

CE: How many hours did you work?

SG: 9 til 5. We had an hour for dinner. I came home to dinner because I only lived outside the gates.

CE: And what about breaks?

SG: Well you'd ask to go to the toilet and you'd sit in the toilet smoking tho I don't smoke now, but you'd sit in the toilet on the floor smoking and talk to all the girls. But I mean, they wouldn't stop you going out for a break and the smoking, and the toilet, but you had touse... you couldn't leave your work pile up. If you were on a line, you couldn't leave your work pile up. What I used to do was buttonhole all the way to the very top of the line, and then go out the toilet. Then come back and by the time I'd come back I'd catch up. But then that was only when you start to be qualified like a... you know. But it was lovely.

44:19

CE: Did you have to wear a uniform to work?

SG: Overall.

CE: Did they give you the overall?

SG: Yeah - you had to buy your own overall.

CE: You had to buy it..?

SG: Yeah - blue (?) . Well (?) was blue. But.... yeah everybody had overalls. Yeah.

CE; There's a picture of you..... (Referring to the picture)

SG: Cos you had to cover... you had to cover your clothes see. Cos you would be covered in fluff. And you had scissors and the scissors was like.. only prongs and you'd be cutting like that with the scissors... (?) you'd snip like that look... it wouldn't be ordinary slip.... scissors. The scissors would be hooked on your hand.

CE: (Referring to the picture again) You got a bandage on your finger here.. tell me what happened?

SG: Oh... I was sewing awayand I was looking.. I turned my head like that and the needle went right in the middle of my finger. And my finger stuck in the middle of.. well the needle was in the middle of my finger and I went 'Ohhh!!' Well my father come along and went boink like that and hit it out. You know he turned the wheel and got my finger out. Well I had to go to the nurse then cos we had a nurse in our first aid room, and I went there and she bandaged it like.

CE: Were there many accidents in the factory?

SG: Finger wise, you'd have you fin... and you know the needles, but not cuts or anything, nothing...

CE: So nothing major?

SG: No. No. Like em.. no. A lot the needles in there but it's so simple to... it's so simple to happen, when you're sewing. Cos my next door neighbour, she worked there as well... Pat,

CE: ...al right...

SG: She worked there for years.

CE: Do you want a break?

SG: I don't mind if you want a cup of tea.

CE: No. Can you remember any of the rules.. did you have rules and regulations, helth and safety.. that kind of thing?

SG: No. The only thing is, at Christmas time they allowed you to put trimmings on your machines, like trimmings going... garlands going all round the machines... you were allowed that. Um.. and you were allowed to bring drink in the last day of your Christmas time.. cos by 1 o'clock they may as well have shut the factory down cos everyone was sloshed like. But um they knew that - the bosses didn't mind that, they... it was Christmas, and you had a bonus, you had a Christmas bonus in your pay packet. Evrybody had that. They all had the same.

CE: So how much time off did you have for Christmas?

SG: Oh about a week that's all.

CE: You had a whole week?

SG: ... a week.

CE: Did the factory shut then?

SG; Mmm.

CE: For a week?

SG: Yeah.

CE: And what about other holidays.. do you remember...?

SG: Um.. the miners' - the last week of July, the first week of August.

CE: So the factory shut... ?

SG: ...shut. For two weeks.

CE: And was that a paid holiday?

SG: Oh I can't remember. Oh i think.. yeah you had holiday pay. Because there was a dispute... cos they was saying this one girl, she didn't have her holiday pay and they took her up the office and they sorted it out. Oh I think we did have holiday pay. Yeah.

CE: Do you remember.. what was the biggest dispute you remember? The mos exciting one then?

SG: Well when they shut us out of the gates. (She laughs) I think because it was a dispute it was something simple it was and he'd had enough I think. Because if it was too cold you were allowed to leave. There was a degree, and they'd have a look at the thermometer on the wall and if it went colder than that, you were allowed to walk out. And if it was too hot, they'd open all the windows but then you could go out as well. You weren't allowed to work too hot or too cold. But to go out on strike because the music wouldn't come on, I mean he'd had enough I think and he just shut the gate. And I think that we were all shocked. We didn't think he'd do that. Because other times we've stayed in the canteen look. but because we was all down the road, we wasn't going to have it and that, and he just shut the gates.

CE: So how did you get round that?

SG: Well we were all standing outside looking gobsmacked. But he had us back in, but I mean we were doing silly things like his um... well one minute there was something going on in the toilets and i thought what's all the... once the machines would go dead you'd think "Oh what's up?" like. And then you'd think all out out... All out... Everybody out, and you'd go outside in the canteen and tell you what's up. Well something had gone on in the toilet... the manager didn't like, and the you know they got to the bottom of it and then we all piled back in then. Then the machines start up again. But it was a bit noisy with all the machines going all the time mind. It was noisy you know.

CE: Did you have any protection?

SG: No.

CE: Did it affect anybody's hearing do you think?

SG: No. I think it was just all these vroom vroom sewing machines noises and you didn't take any notice, cos you'd be laughing and joking with the girls around you, you

know. You'd have one opposite your line there and you know you'd be talking to them and you'd meet them everyday, so "we went to the Queens last night and we had a good time in the dance" you know? Cos in the 50s then you had all the Rock 'n Roll didn't you. And we were Rock 'n Roll mad. And.. there's a fabulous time it was.

CE: Did you suffer any health consequences from working?

SG: No. No. Nor my mother. My mother lived to 86 when she died. My father had... my father fell and had a broked femur but I mean my father was elderly as well. And he worked all the time he used to do all the pipes to the presses. My father would strip the whole presses if they wanted to move em. My father was there... well he was in work all the time, my father was.

CE: You said there was a canteen? Do you remember the food? Was it good food?

SG: Yeah. Yeah it was reasonable as well. It was pretty good. Like you could go and have a dinner or you could go and have a sandwich or.. you know and they had sweets you know, but yeah it was alright like. But I always went home to dinner because my prefab was only outside. But in the mornings if you wanted toast and tea, cos I can remember the toast being delicious, cos it would stop for a break in the morning, say about 11 o'clock, well then you go in for toast and tea. Amnd then say about 12 - 1 o'clock well that's your dinner time. 12 - 1. But... no, they always had canteen staff. Yeah, lovely.

53:07

CE: You've told me about the holidays.. did you go anywhere on holiday?

SG: Yeah we went.. there was um.. first time, four of us to Southsea, with the sailors. That was a lovely holiday that was in Southsea. And the next time there was 6 of us and we went to Southsea for a holiday. And then a couple of us in the factory, we went up to my mother's caravan. We had a caravan in Swanbridge, and a lot of the girls went down there with me, you know. Yeah, but the Southsea holidays were great.

CE: Where's Southsea?

SG: By Portsmouth.. and there were sailors.

CE: That was quite a long way to go?

SG: Yeah. We paid for a couple of months. Um all of us paid in the money like init? But the last time 6 of us went, we were in 2 different boarding houses.

CE: Why did you go there then?

SG: After the sailors I think.

CE: You said you met your husband in Tredegar in the dance hall....

SG: As I said I was 14 when I was going with him first and then I didn't see him... he went to Newport Art College, and then he came up the dance one night when he was about 22 and I seen him and we got together and... because he was an artist.

CE: Oh was he?

SG: My youngest son is an artist as well - graphic design.

CE: That's lovely isn't it.

SG: But.. no he was lovely Eric was... he died... but yeah we had a lovely white wedding, and a lot of factory girls came. I had a big wedding... yeah.

CE: Did you miss you know... when you left?

SG: No, because we tried for a house. We had a house then and I went in for a baby then...

CE: And you were happy to stay at home with the baby?

SG: Oh yeah, nobody would mind my children. My mother wouldn't give her work to mind my children, cos my mother worked all her life until she was 80.

CE: Did she? In the same factory?

SG: No she went to a different factory. She went to LCR components. She even took a machine home with her in her 70s and she was doing it in the house. My mother liked her job. She wouldn't baby sit. No... my mother went to Bingo every night, but she... no my mother was nev... she wouldn't... if you said can you have the children for us to go out... no. She wouldn't. So I was with the boys like. Lee's 46 and... she wouldn't mind them. They didn't in them days though. My mother wouldn't give up her life to stay in... No - you had them and you look after them.

CE: Independent women. Are you in contact with your former workmates?

SG: All the time.

CE: And you've stayed in contact over the years?

SG: All the time. Even the ones living in Rumney, Markham... I've got friends who worked in Markham on the duffel line. No... Denex girls have stuck together. We had a reunion now in.. in September. About 45 come.

CE: And where did you go?

SG: In the local Moose Hall.

CE; And what did you do?

SG: Paul was there and he was playing the music. And we had drinks and that and we all just cwtched one another. Cos that's what it's like when you meet the Denex, like the girls, we go "Hiya - how's it going?" And they're all married with families now and.. oh wish it was still going init. And everybody feels that - not just me and my friends. They all feel that.

CE: Do you miss the camaraderie now?

SG: Yeah. The other week I put a photo of the Denex girls in the paper, in the Gwent Gazette. And they published it and they was awfully chuffed cos they'd seen it in the Gwent Gazette. That was about a month ago it went in there. Yeah.

CE: You said you've got a couple of photos here. You arranged a big reunion did you?

SG: Yeah. That was up in the Ironsides in Cefn Golau (?) that was. My mother was alive then, and my... aye cos Edward was only a little boy. Edwards was about 1 I think and he's 33 now. But that was a big one. Cos there's suprevisors on here (she talks about the picture) like men who's on the cutting room, and suprevisors, Howard - he died, but there's a lot who've passed away. Ada by there - she died... on the disco (?). There's awful lot... but that was fabulous it was.

CE: How many of you got together?

SG: There was about 200 there.

CE: When did the factory finally shut?

SG: Don't know the date.

CE; But you'd long left?

SG: Yeah - my mother and father was working there a couple of years after I left... my father was you know...

CE: Do you remember if it was 60s 70s 80s?

SG: It was the late 70s..

CE: Late 70s.. Looking back, how do you feel about the time you spent working in a factory?

SG: Well I don't think... I don't know if they got that closeness today in factories.. I don't know. Because I don't know anything about factories now. But being its the only factory in the town and everybody left school and went there. If they stayed 6 weeks, if they stayed 2 months, like some do say "Oh I was only there 6 months!" but that's where you went. When you left school everybody went there because that was the main employer in the town. Besides, they had the LCR, but they had Nut and Bolt, that was another factory Nut and Bolt, but that was car parts and that. Um and the Crown Cork, that was another factory but that was like metal tops. That wasn't a sewing industry. But no.... that was the main place.

CE: And you enjoyed it?

SG: Well, I... it was the best working life... I think I would have stayed there until the end if I hadn't had my children, because even my friend now Sylvie, she keeps saying "Oh If we could go back to them days again." Pity we didn't have an hour to (?) go there now. But you know the memories that you have... we laugh over things that happened. That girl still alive marlene who had the bloody lockjaw! Honest, the girl nearly died cos she threw the cotton reel and it was a big cotton reel and it hit her on the jaw, and well the factory... all the machines were shut off. And one time, Marlene Elbert - she passed away now - she lived in Hereford. She wrote I love Elvis down the trouser leg. So all the machines went off now, so we're saying "What's the matter?". "Well if you don't own up, you'll all be sacked off the line." She was Elvis mad, she was crackers, she had all Elvis all over her machine and she said to the supervisor, she said 'It was me.' And she had to go up the office, and I think she had to pay for the trouser. But it was only chalk - "I Love Elvis" all the way down the leg. But...

CE: She wasn't sacked then.

SG: No. She had a warning... and they said that you know, "you mustn't do things like that.' But they didn't sack her. No.

CE: Great. That was great. Thank you very much.

SG: Thank you. Yeah.

1:02:48

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD Y CYFWELIAD