

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Lines/Triang – Merthyr Tudful; GEC, Merthyr Tudful; GEC/Hitachi , Hirwaun Industrial Estate

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Could you tell me a little about your background? Your mother, your father what they did for a living, your siblings... that kind of thing.

Well, to start with, my father was born over the next Valley and his father was killed in the First World War, left his mother with seven children... She did remarry, her husband's friend, he said he would look after them you know. When she died, within 12 months I think of getting married, she died in childbirth, the girls were all put into homes, Mullers' Homes in Bristol and my father and his brother who were 13 and 14 year old were brought over here because their uncle was the under manager of the colliery. So he brought them over here and he put them in lodgings and kept his eye on them. That's my father's background. My mother was born in Merthyr Vale not very far from where my father was in the lodgings and of course over the years they got friendly and got married. I think they got married in 1926 and they lived first of all with my grandparents, of course when I was born I was my grandparents' favourite [laughs]. They had a house of their own and they had two other children, my two sisters. My father himself then was killed when he was 43, on top of the pit, left my mother with 3 children again. Well at that time I was... 1943... no he was killed in 1947, I was 19 then, course I got married the following year and my two sisters were brought up by my mother, hard going. My mother didn't even have coal for two or three years, which she should have had because my father was killed on the pit. There's a lot of mystery over my father's death, if the truth had come out then my mother should have had a big compensation, but she didn't.

What was your father then, was he a banksman?

Working in the screens where they screened the coal. My mother was told about 4 years later by somebody who was in a pub and the boy who worked with my father, said that when they found my father his cap was found the other side of the machine, my father never ever worked without a cap on. He wouldn't go to the coal house for coal without a cap on. But that was just before the NHS took over, everybody was fighting for their own jobs in those days, if you understand. But that's all over and done with now, I could tell you quite a few stories on that line.

03:51 So tell me about your education then.

I mean, when my mother was left with three of us she couldn't put me to college, could she?

No. Start at the beginning, you know with primary...

Oh, we all went to the primary school and the three of us went to the grammar school in Quakers Yard then... and then when I was 14, instead of staying there and doing my GCEs I had a transfer to the technical college in Pentrebach because I wanted to do clerical work. I had a couple of certificate there, shorthand, typing, bookkeeping, commerce. But it was only a 12 month course, I would have liked to have stayed there a lot longer but... those were the days. I had a job in an office...

Before you go there can I ask you... If things had been different would you have liked to of stayed in school?

Well I would have liked to of gone to college. Knowing what I know now, I know I would have done well in college... I mean all I know now I learnt over the years, but if you're left with three children and your husband got killed you haven't got a hope in hell have you? And neither did my two sisters... my sister wen she was 14 she went to work in Kayser Bondor and then my other younger sister she went to work in an office. So three of us worked in offices to start with, of course when I got married then, I mean the money in offices was terrible.

Sorry, where was the office where you worked?

I worked, Rediffusion it was called. In those days it was just piped wireless, no television in those days. Thats where I met my husband, he worked there. Well after we had been married, i should say about 2 years I decided I was going to go and work in the factory, there was more money in the factory... A friend of mine, a neighbour, was working there and she said "You'll have better money there, come to the factory with me." So I went, had an interview and... Miss Wheeler, she was a lovely lady, spinster, big catholic lady from Merthyr and she said "What do you want to work in the factory for?" well I said, "I want money" I said, "My husband has just come out of the forces, you haven't got a chance to save to get anything, I thought if I went in the factory for a while I'd have a bit more money". She kept on and on about me coming to work in the office with her and I couldn't tell her that her next in charge was in school with me and she was a pain in the butt, so I would never have worked with her. Anyway the last time she came up to me and tried to persuade me I said, "Too late now I'm pregnant. I'll be finishing before long." So I stayed there until I had Colin and then, well I didn't work for a couple of years...

7:05 Okay, before we go on, I wanted to ask you a little bit more. You haven't told me where you worked, what factory you went to work in?

I went to work in Lines. I was only there just over twelve months then I became pregnant. That is the amount of my factory work. I've got to say, I was there under two years but I enjoyed every minute of it.

Describe to me the first day you walked in. Describe what Lines was like on that first day?

Noisy. I've got to say that. And of course it was dirty work, but you didn't mind that if you were earning a couple of pound every week. What I found about factory work, you could talk to one another, you could discuss things, you could sing. We enjoyed our work. It was dirty work but we enjoyed it.

What year was it now, you went to work in Lines?

19... 49. I went there just before Christmas. It was a Christmas rush. I'll always remember the chargehand, because he knew I worked in an office, put me to do some stock taking [laughs] everybody was taking wine in because it was the day before Christmas eve and I don't know if it was because I'd had a glass of sherry or not but I fell in a tub of little wheels [laughs] and they had to pull me out... and then the chairman came along and he said "What are we going to do with you Marj?" I said "Oh, never mind I won't be here after today", "Oh you never know." he said "Would you like to come back after Christmas?" and I said "Well, I wouldn't mind." So any way the day before I finished he came up to me and said "We're starting back on [such and such a date] if you want a job here its yours." So I went back then permanently. That would have been in about January '51.

So you started there, then, as a kind of casual worker?

I started originally as a Christmas rush, before Christmas, and then they asked me to come back then permanently after Christmas.

Before you worked there did you know realise you were going to enjoy it as much as you did?

Well, I mean, as far as enjoying work of any sort, nobody enjoys work. But I knew a couple of the ladies that worked there and they said it was a lovely atmosphere to work, so I wasn't worried about going there.

Did they give you any training at all?

Not really. I mean prior to that Lines had been doing war work and it was very very highly trained work they made gliders and things like that there in the war. But the work we were doing, it was only toys, it wasn't very skilled work.

Can you describe to me, then the working day? What was the work you did during the day?

When I went back permanently, I'll have to stop to think now because it was 65 years ago, or 60 odd years anyway. Well it was all assembly... You know these, I don't know if you can remember, as a little girl they used to have what they call 'Nibbles' or something, push chairs... Dolls push chairs and you could fold them and open them up. We used to weld the joint of them, and I used to do the riveting and the joints, and that girl working with me used to do the welding. It was simple work

11:08 Were you on a line?

Well a kind of a line yes, yeah. You had to do a certain amount during the day, you were expected to do a certain amount.

Do you remember what your wages were when you started working there?

I know I was earning in the office about £2 odd a week and when I went there it was nearly double, so I must have been earning about £4. That was a lot of money compared to what I had been earning then.

Would you say that that was a lot of money in those days?

Well not a lot, not a lot. But it was better than office work. I mean, everybody went into a factory simply because you had more money than in an office. Then of course when I finished I finished there when I was having my first little boy, well I didn't work for quite a few years then. Then I started doing odd jobs two days a week if I could have somebody to look after... I had a sister in law who used to look after my little boy so many days a week. Well then I moved from Heolgerrig, Merthyr, down here to live then, the only jobs around here, I worked in the Co-Operative for a while. I had a neighbour here who used to keep an eye on him when he came home from school and things like that. You had to do jobs in those days that suited your family really.

Gong back to lines then. Do you remember what you used to do with your money? How did you spend your money?

Well mostly, we had a little cottage, all it was basically was four walls. So every pound we had spare we spent on that house trying to make it a home. I always remember saying... we had just built a little bathroom, put hot water in, and I said "I'm never never going to move from here unless I get hot water." Well in the mean time the lady that lived here was my father's aunt and her daughter offered us the house. Of course my husband said "It's a lovely house Marj you could do something with that." Of course by then I had two children we needed a bigger house. So anyway we came down here, no hot water, no electric. We had to start from scratch again. My husband would say "I like to do this" or "I'd like to do that" I said "Right oh.", "What if I make a mess of it Marj?", "We scrap it and we start again." and whatever job he did I was working with him. If he was mixing cement I was mixing cement or I was mixing it and he was using it. We mixed I don't know how many tons of cement up in our first home up there and then we sold it and moved down here. So that's your answer, We spent it all on our home, trying to get a little home together.

14:35 Can you tell me some other things then? What were your first impressions of the factory?

Well, up until then I had never been inside a factory and as I said, my first impressions were that it was just noisy, but you get used to that after a day or so.

How many of you worked there?

Oh, now, I don't know. There was hundreds working there altogether in the different departments. I was lucky, I had a good chargehand, that little girls brother. From the first time he knew me, I think he remembered my husband as a little boy going to school and as soon as he knew I was pregnant clean little job, what we call a cushy little job. As long as I did my work he was good to me, very good to me.

Did you have to wear an overall or uniform?

Oh yeah we had to wear overalls, you can see in the photo leather pinafores over our overalls. But we didn't worry, we came home, and a good wash and that was it.

Were those supplied by the company?

The aprons were but not the overalls, we provided our own overalls.

How many of you who worked there were women, was it mainly women?

I would say 50/50... 50/50. I can always remember, once I was put on a job and I thought "*this is easy.*", going hell for leather as they say and one of the men came up to me and said "*Take it easy.*", I said "*What do you mean?*", "*Take it easy.*" Well of course they had time motion study for all these jobs and you had to do a certain job, well I was going far higher than what they expect too, "*You're spoiling hat job for the men.*" he said. It just didn't make sense to me in those days, because I thought if I do my job perhaps I'll have a bonus, which I did have. But they were telling me to go slow because I was spoiling the rate for men, I was a woman.

Were you paid the same as the men?

No, oh no. You didn't have the same rate as the men.

But you were doing the same work as the men?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you know what the men were paid?

Oh I haven't got a clue, love. I can't remember. I can't even remember what I was on by the time I finished there. I mean, when you look back the value of money has gone... its exploded since then. You think of it now, when I first had a house on my own a loaf of bread was 4p, old pence, and that was delivered to the door for 4p. Looking at the price of things today and when we tell youngster what we paid, they don't believe us. I mean they don't believe that we could live on £5 a week, but we had to. I was paying £1 a week rent and I had £5 to live on, so you could imagine you didn't have a lot to play around with.

18:00 How did you get to work everyday?

Well when I lived in Heolgerrig I was catching a bus from where I lived down to the village... NO I walked from where I lived about half a mile down to the village and caught a bus from there down to Lines.

Was that public transport then?

Yes.

You had to pay for that?

Yes, yes. Oh yes.

When did you have to get to work in the morning?

I had to start work at 8 O'clock. So I was catching a bus up in the village about 7:20 so I had to leave the house at 7 O'clock

Did you clock in then?

Yes.

What about breaks during the day, do you remember what your breaks were?

We had breaks, yeah. 10 minute breaks.

In the morning and the afternoon?

Yeah. Yeah, and lunch.

Do you remember how long you had for lunch?

Probably 3 quarters of an hour or an hour, I'm not sure, love. It going back too long [laughs]

When did you finish the day then, if you stated at 8?

At quarter past 4. That was our finishing time.

That was quite a good day then?

Good long day, yes.

What was the relationship between you and the men, did you get in with the men?

Yeah, very well, yeah.

How did you feel though about the fact that you were told, you know...?

I'll tell you a little story. Course by the time I finished... I was very short... by the time I finished I was quite a little tum. And the men used to shout "*Here she comes, Mrs 5X5.*" 5ft high and 5ft wide. That was their way of teasing me. They were very good to me, I've got to say.

Did you feel resentful that they were earning more money than you, although you knew you were doing the same work?

We didn't know any different in those days did we. No, we didn't know any different.

How about Unions in the factory, was it Unionised?

Well, I wasn't in a Union. I mean I wasn't there long enough really, I don't think I joined a Union when I was there because I knew I wasn't going to be there for a while. Then over the years I worked in offices and if I was ill I was paid. So I only paid them what was called a married woman stamp, a basic stamp. I worked then until I was 49, I worked in a garage in Merthyr, I was in the stores in the office. They were talking about taking the garage down, they did take it down eventually, course everybody was looking for a job. A friend of mine who worked in Hita... well GEC it was then, she said "*Why don't you come and work in the factory with us?*", "*Oh, I don't know*" I said. I ummed and aahed, and then I thought if I'm going to work in a factory now, I'm not going to be paid if I'm ill so I paid a full stamp then and I joined a Union when I was 49.

21:38 Okay we'll come back to that. Do you remember then, you weren't in the Union at Lines: Was it Triang then or was it Lines? Or does it matter, it was the same?

Well, it was the same people working there, different firms took over. I think Lines was the war time name for the factory and then Triangs, well they made prams as well as toys, the made full size prams and toys.

But you only worked the toys did you?

Yes, yeah.

Right, you weren't a member, but do you remember any disputes, problems, strikes anything like that?

No. Not while I was there, no.

So it was a really happy work force?

Yes, yes it was quite a good factory.

What about your relationship with the other women, can you describe that to me?

Well, I got on alright with everybody.

Did you used to go out with them?

Oh no, I was a married woman wasn't I.

So you never went out with them socially?

Married women didn't go out on their own in those days, love. They only went out with their husbands, and that wasn't very often [laughs].

What about Christmas parties or anything like that. Was there anything like that, did Triang put on...?

Well a I say I was only there before one Christmas then I worked a few months into the following year so I wasn't really there the second Christmas.

Do you think the work was dangerous in any way?

Well I mean there were some jobs... I even went to work on... They had guards on them, they did have guards on them so they could've been dangerous if they didn't have the guards on them. It was quite a safe factory I think.

Were you made aware of health and safety?

Oh yeah. yeah.

Where there any accident that you were aware of?

I don't remember anybody having an accident, no.

Can you remember any of the rules and regulations?

Not really.

What about the facilities in the factory, was the factory heated...?

Yes, yes, yes.

What about other facilities?

We had toilets, we had our own toilets. I can't remember what we used to do for lunch.

You don't remember if there was a canteen or not?

Yeah. there was a canteen there, we didn't go there for breaks but we went there for lunch, that's right.

What did you do during breaks then?

We usually took something to do with us and had a cup of tea there you know. But going back, this is 60 odd years, things are not really as cut and dried as I would like to tell you they were. Your memory does go a little bit hazy after 60 odd years [laughs].

24:57 *No, you're doing really well.*

Yeah?

Yeah. I know you weren't there very long, but... how many days did you work a week?
Full time.

So it was 5 days?
5 Days, yeah.

Was there any weekend work?
No, no.

Or shift work?
Not the women anyway, I can't remember if the men did any shift work, I never did shift work.

Did the factory shut on he weekend do you remember?
I can't remember. I should imagine some of the men worked on the weekend to get overtime. I never worked anyway, just the 5 days.

So you never did overtime or anything like that then?
No, no.

So were you allowed to talk while you worked?
Oh yes.

And you said you sang?
Yes we sang sometimes [laughs].

Did they put records on?
No. It was too noisy to put records on.

So it was just somebody in the factory who started...?
Someone sitting along side you, yeah.

Do you remember what you sang?
Lots of different songs in those days.

Do you remember any of them?
I mean most of the songs then were wartime songs, picked up during the war. No I can't remember what songs they were. But I will tell you, every song I learnt I still can sing, all the words. You don't forget the song you hear, what we learnt when we were young. The song that come out today, there's no words with them is there?

So where they like Gracie Fields songs or Vera Lynn songs, that kind of thing?
Probably yes. It wasn't long after the war was it. Only a couple of years.

Did you have any holidays while you were there, do you remember?
I worked until the holidays and, that was in the July. I started there after the Christmas and worked there until the July full time. I finished then, of course in those days you were entitled to six weeks wages prior to you having a baby and six weeks afterwards. Course it was more than six weeks to go and I can remember going up to the dole and signing on the dole. At first she tried to send me over to Rhigos and I said I can't get transport over there, that was it. So the second time I went up she said "*What is your trouble, are you pregnant?*", I said, "*Its not trouble, but I' am pregnant, yes.*". "*Well you don't want a job do you?*", I said, "*I've got until November to go. Three months*

work is better than nothing, or three months dole, I don't mind." and she said *"I'll fill it in"*. So I had six weeks dole before I went on the sick.

28:16 Why did you leave Lines then?

Well I was getting quite big then and by the time the fortnights holiday, I was just about ready to give up work then. I mean you can't do factory work when you are very heavily pregnant.

No, I was just wondering because you said you worked up to the holidays, but you were still looking for work?

Well I didn't really want work, I just wanted a couple of weeks grace until I had my pregnancy money. Maternity money rather [laughs]. Mind you there were girls going up to the dole then with babies in prams, and signing on for years after they had the baby and they got away with it. I just didn't have the cheek to do it [laughs].

Where you aware of having any Bank Holidays with pay while you were there?

Well I had my holiday pay because I was finishing then, you see?

So you think you would have paid Bank Holidays as well?

Yes, they were having Bank Holiday pay then.

What was the attitude, do you think, of the factory, to women who had children could you have gone back to work there with children if you wanted to?

Oh yes, if you had somebody to look after your children for you. Yes, no reason why you couldn't. There were girls working with me then that had children, yeah. Probably living next door to their parents sisters or whatever, yeah.

So that was perfectly okay with the factory?

Yes, oh yeah.

Did they have any child care facilities?

No. no. No such thing in those days.

What was the age of the women working there, did they go from young to...?

Well my best friend worked till she was 60, all her life in a factory because she never had children. And she had a sister in law who lived with her and she worked in the factory till she was 60.

That was in Triang?

Yes.

Are you still in touch with some of the people who worked there?

They're all dead, love. I mean even some of the girls that were living near me, a lot younger than me, they've all died. I'm passed my sell by date put it that way [laughs].

I don't think so. How did you feel about the time you worked in Triang? Tell me how you felt about it.

I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it.

What did you enjoy most about it do you think?

Well with an office job you've got to keep on going and... I don't know what it is, it's just a different attitude, a different atmosphere to office work.

Was that through people you worked with do you think?

Oh no, it was just a different kind of work. I mean over the years I went to other offices, I worked in different shops you had to do all sorts of jobs to suit your family then. When you had someone to look after the children right you took a job.

31:51 So you told me after having your children, and a bit later on, you went back to a factory. Could you tell me about that?

Well at the time of the disaster I was working in the Co-Op, locally. I tried to get a job in the Co-Op part time but the management that I had down there, he didn't want part-timers he wanted full-timers. In the meantime then I got a job in an office in a garage in Merthyr in the stores office, I worked there for many years and only left there to work in Hitachi because they were going to pull the factory down. There was a culvert running under it and they were talking about taking it down. Everybody was looking for a job from there, I work there quite a few years. But it was all part time.

What factory was this now?

It was a garage, Howells Garage, you know big Howells in Cardiff. Howells had a garage in Merthyr and I worked in the stores office there and as I said I had no intentions of ever leaving there, I was only doing part time work because my son was working and things. Then everybody was look for jobs because we knew that it was coming down. That's why I went to work full time in Hitachi.

What was it when you started working there?

GEC, in Merthyr it was. Then eventually Hitachi took over half of it. Then they transferred us from Merthyr over to Hirwaun and Hitachi took over it all then. But I've got to say they were quite a good firm to work for.

What was the difference between when you worked for GEC in Merthyr and Hitachi in Hirwaun?

Well, a different kind of factory to start with. It was a cleaner factory, I mean Hitachi was spotlessly clean. But other than that you still had to do your job, you still had to do your number everyday.

How did you get to Hirwaun, to work?

We had a bus. First of all we had a bus coming around here, they stopped that, we had to go from here up to the next village to catch it, then we had a bus all the way over. Eventually I started using my car, I had a car then. The last go off we didn't have a bus so, in fact the lady who used to take us to work to start with, her mother lived over there and she was a widow and she used to come down here and pick the two of us up here and she picked another one up in Merthyr. She used take about 4 of us to work everyday. Margaret, she was a lovely person, quiet woman. She took us, and when the holidays came she picked her mother up and took her to Ponty and they crashed down in Edwardsville and she got killed. Well I had to take my car to work, there was no other way of getting there, so so the last year I took my car to work then. I mean at the time my husband was working in Hoovers and he was working on shifts so we managed with the one car then.

35:44 Can you describe what GEC was like to work in, in Merthyr?

Yes. Quite a good factory.

What did you make?

Well, in Merthyr, when they started off in Merthyr, we were only making what they call the... the boards you know... you put all the...

Circuit boards?

Circuit boards. Making the circuit boards. My job was cutting the little wires off the back making sure there were no blind, what are they called, and soldering them and then they would be passed over. Well I did that for a couple of years, but of course when we went over to Hirwaun they were making the complete sets over there. Although I went to work on circuit boards to start with I went on other jobs after and they were all nice clean jobs.

Did you have a uniform to wear?

Yes.

In both cases?

I got one here of me in uniform, I think.

So did they provide the uniforms for you.

Yes. yes. We didn't pay for uniforms.

Can you remember your first day at work when you went to GEC, what was it like?

Well, the first time I went to GEC it was so different from anything I had done for many many years. Whatever it was, it was strange, but you know you get used to things after a day or two don't you.

What year was that then?

I was 49 so... '28, '38, '48, '58, '68, '77 was it? '77 I went over there. I was 49 when I went there, see, that's how I know. I joined the Union then and started paying the full stamp because, up until then I'd been paying whatever, you know if I was sick I was always paid in the office.

Is that why you joined the Union?

Yeah, yeah. I never belonged to one before. Well if you were in small firms you didn't.

Was it mainly a women workforce in GEC?

I would say mainly but there where still a lot of men there yes.

Again, did you do the same kind of jobs?

The men were mostly the foremen and the chargehand, we had quite a few young Japanese trainees there, you know, they used to send them over here to be trained, and then they would send them back home.

In GEC?

No, in Hitachi. I've got to say this, they got on well with the Welsh boys they were working with.

The Japanese?

The Japanese boys. They were very very sociable boys and I say this now, they'd get friendly with the local boys and the boys would take them out for a drink in the night. Once the Japanese found out they were going out they were sent back home. It was frowned upon.

You went there when you were a bit older. How long were you in GEC before you went to Hitachi, before it became Hitachi?

I was 49... well quite, a couple of years before we were taken over by Hitachi, yes. I can't remember how many.

39:40 Did you have to train for this job, the GEC job?

Not really, no.

You just picked it up?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Can you remember how much you were paid then, a week, when you started at GEC in Merthyr?

Two or three years ago I would have told you. I know it was nearly double... wait a minute now. I went full time and I was having double what I was having part time, more than double so you know I felt quite well off when I went there.

In GEC?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you remember what you had in Hitachi then when...?

No, n. I mean over the years it was going up and up and up, you know.

There wasn't a leap up or anything?

No, no, no. Not really.

It was a kind of gradual...?

Yeah, yeah.

But it went up every year then?

Well, like everybody else's, it goes up every year. The only thing is we did have to pay our own bus fair over to Hirwaun. We had to provide our own transport.

Oh, did you?

Yes.

Was that expensive?

Well having special bus it wasn't too bad but, I can't remember now what we paid.

It was a special bus, put on by Hitachi?

Oh no, no. it was worked out for, well whoever it was before I started. It was a local bus anyway that started down the valley and picked us up in Merthyr and took us over.

Were there other industries over in Hirwaun?

Oh yes, a lot, yes.

So there was a lot of you going over there by bus then?

Most of the one on our bus were going to Hitachi but we did have an odd one or two working in other factories there, yeah.

You joined the Union when you went to GEC, do you remember which Union it was?

[Laughs] I don't think there was much of a choice. It was something to do with electrical work, see. I can't remember the name of it, no.

Did you feel the workers were fairly treated there in GEC?

I think so, yes.

And what about Hitachi afterwards?

Yes, yes, yes.

Did they accept the Union when you went over there?

Now then. The Japs I think were compelled to accept the Union because the Union was going before they got there. But as I told you, when they first came a took over they said "*Too many white heads here.*" They meant grey haired women. Of course the youngsters, they go down the toilet, they have a cigarette, they're down there 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour. If we went to the toilet we were back in two minutes, and whether they noticed that or not we don't know. So after a couple of months they said they would like to withdraw their statement, "*Whiteheads work well.*" So there we are [Laughs].

Did your experience pay off as well, do you think, you know just life experience?

Well I think so, yes.

Do you think the older women were quite quick at work, you know, was their productivity...?

It isn't that we were quicker than the young ones, but we stuck at it. We didn't go out to the toilet, back and forth, all day like the youngsters. I mean the youngsters were very smart, quick doing their jobs.

43:48 What were the conditions like in, first GEC and then Hitachi, would you say it was a good working environment?

On the whole yes, I think. Only one thing I can remember when we were in Merthyr I think it was; the printed circuit board comes up and it goes over a solder bath and then the woman takes them off and puts them in a bin and then we take them from there and do ours. Well this particular day, what was her name now, Gwen, "*There's something falling down on me all the time*", she said. All of a sudden, they were maggots. Evidently a pigeon or whatever had been up there and the fumes from the solder bath must have killed it and it had died there and it had gone rotten. They had to go up and have a look, the men, and it was a pigeon full of maggots, falling on her as she was working [laughs]. Course they could cure that a bit smartish.

What's a solder bath, can you explain that to me?

It's a bath of boiling solder, the circuit boards would come up on like a track and it would just about fit over it like that, and it would go round like that and then she would pick them off as they were coming off then. What it mean was the little feet of all the, whats it called, were just touching the solder bath and then of course once it had gone past the solder bath was still there boiling all day. It was a hot job that was. But she never complained.

Was it usually women who did that job?

Yeah, yes.

So did the women usually do the kind of micro...?

When I was working I worked with the screen. You couldn't see the little pin holes, what are they called, dry joints. As it went over the solders and perhaps there would be a bubble or something like that and it would burst and you would have a dry joint, well they had to be desoldered before it would go any further then.

Was that hard on your eyes?

Well we had like a frame and we used to put it behind there and we used to work with it under a frame. My eye sight was pretty good.

Was the work dangerous in any way?

Well having boiling solder i could have been I suppose, but we didn't regard it as dangerous at all, no.

Were you made aware of health and safety, once again?

I suppose that whoever had arranged all this, they were aware of all the health and the safety of the staff. I can't remember anything happening that was dangerous anyway.

Except the poor old pigeon.

Except the poor old pigeon up the top [laughs].

Did they have time and motion in those days?

Oh yes. Yes you had a certain amount to do. I tell you what they did do; they used to pay us a bonus if we were early everyday. It was no fault of ours if we were late, it wold be the bus at fault but we still had to be there early everyday to get this one bonus.

Do you remember how much that was?

No. A couple of bob I expect [laughs].

What were the facilities like in GEC and then Hitachi?

We had a nurse. We had a nurse in both places.

Toilets?

Yes. Lovely toilets. Clean toilets.

What about a canteen?

And a lovely canteen, yeah.

In both places?

Yeah.

Would you say Hitachi was...?

Hitachi had a very good canteen there, yes.

Would you say you had better facilities in Hitachi?

I think so yes.

48:27 How was the relationship between the workers and the management at Hitachi?

The Japanese management, we had little to do with them. We didn't have any conversation with them at all it was all done through our foremen and our chargehands. But they seemed to get on well, they used to have meetings and all this and that and sort things out.

Would you say they were good employers?

Well I thought so, yeah.

And fair?

Yes, oh yeah.

Were people allowed to talk while they worked?

Well you could talk but, I mean, you had to concentrate more on that job than what we did in Lines.

What about smoking and things like that?

You weren't allowed to smoke. You had to go outside to smoke or to the toilet to smoke. That didn't worry me at all [laughs].

Do you think you suffered any long term health effects from working, from any of the factories?

No, no, no.

What was the relationship, again, between the women and the men in, first of all GEC and then Hitachi, was that a good relationship?

Well we... Most of the men did different types of work in Hitachi to start with it was more skilled, what the men were doing. I mean they were working on televisions, mind, different to... it wasn't just a board they were working on they were working on televisions the men were.

Did they earn a lot more money than you did?

Oh I should imagine so yes.

But you weren't aware of what they earned?

No, no.

When you worked, you said you were married twice, how did your husbands...

Well my second husband I didn't get married to until I was 70.

Oh I see.

So years later, that was.

50:32 What was the reaction of your husband to the fact that you worked, was he alright with that?

Well he profited as well as me didn't he?

But he was supportive was he?

Oh yes, he didn't mind me going back to work, no. Well in those days you knew if you didn't go back to work you were existing, not living. If you wanted any extras out of life you had to go to work.

And you went back to work full time didn't you, so did he help more with the domestic work at home?

[Laughs] If you asked him to make anything you could guarantee there would be a tin of beans in it. No he wasn't a very good cook I'm afraid, but as far as anything else goes on the house, anything that's been done to this house, my first husband did it. He was a good do it yourself man.

How many days a week did you work in GEC and Hitachi?

Full time.

So 5 days a week?

Yes, yeah.

Was there any overtime or shift work?

No. Not for women anyway.

Do you remember what your hours were, again?

Well, I think we used to start at 8 O'clock when we were in Lines and finish about quarter past 4. But when we worked in Hitachi we used to be over there by 8. We had to be there by 8 and I think we worked until about half past 4.

So longer hours?

I think so. I can't remember exactly now.

Do you remember your breaks or anything?

No. We had breaks, that's all I know.

Do you remember what the canteen was like, was it good food?

Oh Hitachi was excellent. It was like a restaurant.

Did you used to eat there?

Yes. We ate there everyday.

Subsidised food?

Well I suppose it must have been.

Was it cheap, was it?

Well it wasn't cheap, but...

Well reasonable then?

Reasonable prices, yes.

For what you were getting?

Yes, yeah.

Did you have an annual holiday allowance with pay?

Oh yes. Yeah.

And bank holidays?

Yes. yes.

How many days a year did you have for your holidays, do you remember?

Well the usual, I would say Christmas day, Boxing day and I think we'd have the rest of the week off. If I remember rightly. Well then we'd have Easter Monday, Whitsun Monday and Tuesday, if I remember rightly. August bank holiday, which is different now to what it used to be. Yeah we had regular holidays.

54:04 What about summer holidays, did you have one, two three week off?

Fortnight holidays.

Fortnight holiday?

Yes. Yeah.

And did you have to take them, did the factory shut down?

Now that's what I'm trying to remember. I know when my husband was wiring in Hoovers, they had to take it at a certain time every year and if I remember, at one time the miners were the same time. Then they altered, the miners were one week different from the factories. I can't remember whether... I can't remember because at that particular time we had a little touring caravan so we didn't have to go booking holidays, we went wherever we wanted to go.

Where did you tend to go in your touring caravan?

Saundersfoot, Tenby, West Wales. We went up to Derbyshire once or twice, Scarborough. But I couldn't get him to come abroad [laughs]. The South Coast, we went to Eastbourne a few times. We did quite a lot of traveling when we had the caravan. As soon as he died I sold it. My first husband died of cancer, see.

When did he die?

'91. 1991. Then I met my second husband... well I met him because he was going into the coastal forces association we belonged to and his wife died... My husband died in the March and his wife died in the February. I had met them once down in Bridgend in a Christmas do. Then I started going back and for to the... we used to have monthly meetings and a friend of mine from Heolgerrig, from Shirley Gardens, her and her husband said "*Don't stop coming to the club now just because you husband has died. You must come down. You can come down with us.*" So of course I started going back a fore with them. Well you know how it is, if we had any do's all the odd ones were stuck together so Glyn and I... that's my second husband.

I was just going to ask, were you allowed days off for personal reasons, or did you have to lose a days pay?

Oh, you'd have to lose a days pay, say you wanted to go to a funeral or something like that. Yes you'd have to lose a days pay. I can't remember very well but say it was a sister or a brother or somebody close, they might have paid us but otherwise, no. If I remember rightly.

What about social activities organised by the workers, I know you were married, but you were a bit older. Was there any kind of social...?

No I don't think they organised a social... I mean everybody that worked in Hitachi then, were from Merthyr, Abervan, Aberdare all around the area, so you couldn't very well organise much then could you.

They didn't have a Christmas party or a Christmas lunch or...?

Well, I think we had a Christmas lunch or something like that.

In the canteen?

They decorated the canteen and had a special dinner, but I wouldn't call them parties.

Did the factory have a social club?

Now I think they did. Mostly for the men I think they were involved... what I would have called the tradesmen the ones who were trained to do things. I think they had sort of a club.

These young men who came over from Japan. Where did they live then, do you know?

Well they lived in hotels and things locally.

And were they training them for management, were they?

Yeah, yes.

Did you have any people like that while you were there?

I mean, we never had contact but they did have contact with the young boys working there, not with the women. But they were quite polite, they would say hello, good morning. But they weren't allowed to mix too well with the young Welsh boys [laughs].

59:56 Did you enjoy working in Hitachi?

Yes, I did.

Why do you think that is? Job satisfaction or the company or...?

The point is, as I explained; if you didn't work, you didn't have any extras in life did you. So if you were working in a job that you enjoyed and the Money was good, naturally you enjoyed it.

When did you decide to leave?

I didn't decide to leave. About 12 months before I was 60 I had spondylitis and I couldn't rise my arms very well. So I went on the sick for a while then and of course I finished then when I was 60. But I was on the sick for 12 months before that with spondylitis. Because the job I had I had be holding my hands up and I couldn't do it. Up until then I'd had no problems.

Were you paid when you were on the sick, apart from statutory sick pay, were you paid by the factory?

No I don't think so no, we were on the NHS sick then. No.

How long did you work for in the factory?

I went to GEC when I was 49 and I worked until I was 59.

Are you in contact with any former work mates from Hitachi?

Well when I say contact I Christmas cards, I've got a friend that used to live down here, she went to live up in the next village. If I see her in town we have a chat and things but I can't say we keep contact because, well she's got relatives and friends up there. But we still keep in touch.

But you don't go out with people?

No, no, no.

Looking back now how do you feel about the time you worked in these factories?

Well as far as I was concerned it was all good for me, yeah. We got things we couldn't have got otherwise. My husband was a fanatic about changing his car. So of course when I worked it was to change his car [laughs], my first husband that was.

What about you, what did you get out of it?

Well, we had holidays, whatever I wanted in the house I had. It wasn't always as old fashioned as this, because as I say, my first husband's gone now 23 years, and there nothing been done since he's gone.

That's great Marj, thank you very much.

Your welcome, love. If I've been any use to you.

61:53

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD