

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

**Mansel Tin Plate – Aberafan, Wern Aluminium – Aberafan,
Metal Box – Neath.**

Interviewee: VSE040 Isabel Thomas

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**Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's Archive of
Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru**

Could you tell me your name and date of birth?

Isabel Thomas, 8/4/1928.

Tell me a little bit about your background, your mum and dad and siblings what were their occupation?

As I was saying my mother was 56 when she died and 2 years later my father died I was 11 years of age. I was brought up with my older sister who also had 7 children.

What did your dad do?

He was a plaster

Did your mother work outside the home?

Oh no

She had her hands full?

Yes as i was saying before my mother had cancer and she did suffer a lot like I said she had 8 children and was only 56 when she died. Years ago they didn't have the facilities but the doctor started my mother off on

morphine and she was a drug addict as she was in so much pain and then she had to wear Lupe couldn't get it for nothing so she had to pay for it. So I haven't got very happy memories of my mother when you think about it.

What about your brothers and sisters what kind of work did they do?

My oldest brother he was a plaster like my father my other brother he was a sort of doing all sorts. But what I remember that my sisters told me they all worked when they were young but I can't remember what they were doing.

0:02:32.3

So can you tell me about your education. Primary and secondary where you went to school?

I went to Carmarthen school when I was five. My mother was a bit of gypsy always moving to different places so I was in Cwmarfon School until she died. Then we went to Aberafan, then a mountain school for a year. Then my father died and I went to live with my sister and ended up in Cwmafon School.

0:03:16.9

Was that still Primary?

Yes

So where did you go then from Cwmafan School?

I was 14 on the Saturday on the Monday I started in the Mansel Tin Plate.

So how did you feel.. So you went from Cwmafan School to the Mansel Tin Plate?

Yes

Was that the same school right through to when you were 14?

Yes

How did you feel about leaving school when you were 14?

Well to be honest I didn't want to leave but as I said I was an orphan and I knew what my sister wanted. The money was handy for her it was a

bit of a in school on Friday and working on the Monday and getting up at 7 in the morning and working till 5 in the night through the week on a Saturday sat at same time and finish at 1.

0:04:33.4

Can you remember how you got the job?

Yes. My sister that was next to me was already working there and she said to the manager that i was looking for a job and he said how old is she? and she said 14 and he says how old is she? Oh 16 so anyway started working in the Mansel.

Before we go on did you have to have an interview talk to someone before you started?

Like I said I went in to the foreman as it was and he said "how old are you?" I said "14". "How old are you?"... I realised what he was saying so I said "oh.. 16!". So I started then but it was hard going.

0:05:43.6

Where you given any training or shown what you had to do or thrown straight in?

The first week I started I was sweeping then you put on quite a few jobs I learnt to do like on sheers or in the circle room where you make tin plates and on the sheers there was one called the guillotine it was like a guillotine you had to push the metal through and the guillotine would come down. There were quite a few jobs you had to learn to do.

What did you do on the sheers?

Same thing you have to cover but the guillotine was going up and down all the time. In contrast the sheers you have the control of that yourself. There was another one then what they called that was the same sort of thing cutting tin and such.

0:07:04.9

What was the works called?

Mansel Tin Plate

Where was it?

In Aberafan do you know where the big hotel is now Blanco's well before that there used to be a bridge which you would go across to the Mansel. That's another thing they also had apart from tin plate they had aluminium so my sister she was working with the tin plate and then they said to her would she like to go to the Wern which they had just started doing it. So she went from the Mansel to the Wern and I done the same thing I cheated my age and went to the Wern to work with my sister.

0:08:11.0

Before we go on the Wern I'd like to ask you a few more things about the Mansel. Can you remember your first day at work? Can you describe it to me the actual place and what it was like what the sound and smell were like that kind of thing?

Well it was a bit frightening place it wasn't a very pretty place so I suppose when your 14 you don't realise it be honest you just take it for granted.

0:08:57.2

Can you describe to me what you saw when you walked in there?

Well I don't know what can I say. I can't put it down in words.

0:09:15.6

So how many worked there?

There were men and women a lot of youngsters like me the men were in a different compartment.

0:09:38.5

What did you produce at the end of the day?

Well to be honest I'm not too sure

0:09:51.6

You've got this tin plate sheeting in and then you cut it in different ways. There was another part then cause as I said they were doing parts for the Wern and it was called a Salt Bath and then you'd have to put the aluminium sheets on a hook and then take it and dip it in the salt. When it came out it would be different shapes with that then you would take it to the rollers and then push it through so it would come straight the other end and keeping on doing that to make it straight that was one thing. I have to go back to the Mansel there was another thing that the

women had to do called a roller and you'd have 2 women one side and 2 women on the other side and then you'd push it through the roller to make it straight. It's a job to explain really. I've showed you a picture of my 2 nieces and that was called you would have to take the men were working and tip the sheets into the water to bring it back out. I had one job then I would have to stand, the sheets would be in water and I would have to pick them out of the water and push them through the machine and straighten them out again. There were quite a few jobs.

0:11:54.9

What kind of clothes did you wear?

Dungarees and it was comical as you know the war was on and they used to call me patchy because I was in my dungarees and had to patch them all the time.

0:12:18.5

Did you used to wear protective clothing?

Oh no

What about those aprons?

Not everyone had to wear those mind – no.

0:12:31.6

So you didn't wear an apron or gloves?

In some jobs didn't have to wear them for others.

But you wore them for some jobs?

Yes I can remember I was there for a week sweeping and then the next week they put me on this job and i didn't have any gloves and my fingers, I forgot about this until you said and I can remember my sister had to dress me because my fingers were cut.

0:13:15.4

I was going to ask you know was the work dangerous in any way?

Oh yes one woman - not the tin plate but with the aluminium - a woman died there.

0:13:33.3

What happened to her?

What it was as I said you were standing one side and the other woman the other side the aluminium was coming over and then had to push it through again. I don't really know what happened to her though but someone did die.

0:14:00.0

Did the machines on the whole did they have of guards or things on them or were they open?

Yes I suppose so, but you had to be aware of it.

0:14:17.7

You said you hurt your hands did you?

Yes.

Anything else, did you hurt yourself in any other way?

Well no I was lucky that way.

0:14:32.7

Do you think the work there had any long term effect on your health?

Yes

In what way then?

Well I think I had a bit of a nervous breakdown. Take it I was 14 starting - it was a big upheaval and of course I had the paper round as well. I didn't have an easy life.

0:15:04.6

Did you think you were over worked at the end of the day?

Yes oh definitely I mean in the winter going to work in the dark and coming home in the dark.

0:15:19.6

So you said you go to work at 7 and come back at 5. Did you have to clock in?'

Oh yes and if we weren't there they'd crop you.

They took your wages?

Yes.

0:15:40.1

So you went to work at 7 - what were your breaks then?

We had hour off for dinner.

An hour for dinner - what did you do then?

Well they had a nice canteen there. We had better food there than in the house.

Did you used to eat in the canteen then?

To be honest with you my sister used to make a box for us it was always corned beef so anyway never used to show her then go in the canteen use our own money though and have a nice meal fair play.

0:16:22.6

Was it quite reasonable - the food? What I mean the price of the food in the canteen?

Yes

Can you remember the price you would have to pay for a meal?

Not really couldn't have been a lot my sister was only giving me half a crown pocket money.

Tell me again how much do you earn going there?

£1/5/- (? 'one and 5')

And you gave all that to your sister?

Yes

And had 2/6 back?

Yes

Did your wages rise?

When I left the Mansel I went to work in the Wern - oh yes my wages were £2.50. (£2/10/- ?). We were working 3 shifts 6 till 2, 2 till 10, 10 till 6

0:17:28.9

So how did that work would you work one shift?

You'd work a week of 6 till 2 then the next week would be 2 till 10 and then the week after that would be 10 till 6 in the morning.

0:17:49.8

How did you find that change in shift?

Night shift was the worst.

Did you find it hard with sleeping and getting up one week you were getting up early?

I was lucky I was because when I was working nights my sister would come upstairs and I wouldn't know she was there. It was hard work but there was a lot of camaraderie then. I mean it was hard going but all us women got on well together.

0:18:31.9

Would you say that for the both places or did you prefer one to the other?

It was nice in the Mansel as well.

You said there were men and women working there - was it about 50/50 or were they more men or more women working there?

I think half and half most of the men they didn't go to the forces because they were exempt. It was very hard going for the men as well. Jobs in the tin plate weren't easy. When I first started in the Mansel I got to know this boy and his name was Daniel we were going to have a date I don't know what happened poor dab. He was.... I can't explain it but you had a trolley and you had to put sheets of tin on the trolley. Anyway, he was doing this and it fell on top of him and it killed him. I didn't know about it. I had a date with him and he

didn't turn up. When I went to work the next day, they said that's what happened. He was pulling this trolley and the sheets fell on top of him. It wasn't an easy job anywhere.

0:20:33.0

Did the men and the women do similar work?

No

Can you explain the differences between?

With the women it was all machinery but with the men you've seen the photos of the men in the tin plate haven't you?

I went to see my Grandfather working in the tin plate works...

That's what I mean.

With the furnace and everything...

Same thing in the Mansel it was hard going. I often wondered how they managed to do it really speaking because they would have the sheets of tin plate and keep on rolling it and it was red hot .

It is a vivid memory - I was only a child - how they let us in they wouldn't these days...

So they were doing that kind of furnace work and you were doing the machine work and cutting. Were you handling hot tin at all or was it the cooled...?

When I worked in the aluminium part, as I said it was coming out of the salt bath and that was hot. We had to have gloves on... thick gloves.

0:21:58.9

Did you have eye protection as well?

No

Ear Protection?

No

I have got to ask you this - you'll probably laugh. Were made aware of health and safety when you worked there?

No. Funny thing - there was a friend of mine who... I don't know what happened... something fell on her leg and you know what they say about unions. She was paying a union. She had a scar up her leg and they tried to fight a case but she never had anything for it.

0:22:44.2

I was going to ask you about the Union were you a member of the union?

You had to be.

Do you remember what the Union was?

No couldn't think of any off hand. It was comical if you didn't pay he would be chasing you for the money. You paid that and she was home from work for quite a while and she didn't get a ha'penny.

0:23:22.0

Do you think the Union let her down?

Oh definitely. Thing is, she's dead now. She's not here to say what happened to her. Eva her name was. I tell what a hard thing was about that. Have you ever heard of Dock Street in Port Talbot? Eva lived down there. She would have to catch a bus from Dock Street all the way to the Mansel, so I used to feel sorry for her. They were in those cottages and if you wanted a cup of tea you'd have to light a fire in the morning for a cup of tea.

0:24:12.8

Do you remember any disputes - talking about the Union?

No I don't remember any.

0:24:30.4

How did you get to work?

Bus from Cwmafan. When I was working at the Wern to would be a bus from Cwmafan to Aberafan then a bus to the Wern.

0:24:48.6

How long did the journey take to Mansel?

About half an hour. What was nice in the morning, we would all be walking together to work.

0:25:16.2

Could you walk to work then?

No you'd get a bus from Cwmafon to Aberafan then walk to the works.

0:25:26.3

You enjoyed that?

Yes what it was there used to be a baker and there was always the lovely smell of bread going to work in the morning.

0:25:40.5

What time did you have to get up?

Had to be at work at 7 - had to be at your station at 7. Well about 6 o'clock to have a cup of tea first. I used to be terrible at getting up in the morning.

0:26:06.3

What about the Wern then how long did it take you to get there?

Well about the same amount of time - leave the house at 5 to get to the Wern for 6 o'clock.

0:26:27.8

Were the hours in the Wern the same as the Mansel?

No as I was saying when i worked at the Mansel I was working days - 7 till 5. In the Wern it was 3 shifts.

0:26:44.0

You said your sister worked there - did you know any others working first of all at the Mansel?

Yes I knew quite a few.

So you were quite at ease with the company?

Yes. Were saying about the Mansel there was a woman there watching you all the time and if you were caught sitting for a minute she would make a sound and you'd have to get up then. Perhaps you'd been working all the time and you'd want to sit for a minute next thing there she would come

0:27:46.9

Was she a supervisor?

Yes. Well you could call her supervisor - more like a working man's pet, fancy women.

0:28:01.4

Did they used to time and motion those days?

No I don't think so

0:28:10.4

Were you on peace work at all or Just a wage?

No Just a wage

0:28:19.1

How did you get on with the men in the factory?

Alright oh yes

Was there much teasing and stuff?

Yes and language. I can always remember - I won't say the word - but I went home and said something to my sister. She said 'What did you say then?' and I said it again and she said 'You shouldn't say that.' I said that 'Everyone said it in the works.' C*** - Of course I didn't know, but she was most upset but I'd picked it up see. And the f (word) - that was men that was. It's the sort of thing, it really broadens your... in the worst part sometimes. If you are innocent when you go to work then not innocent anymore because you just had to accept it.

0:29:27.4

What about the harassment, sexual harassment?

No. No, no. What do you mean by that?

Well the kind of harassment...

The only thing I said... that was in the Mansel that was.... being in the Wern. Can I.. can I tell you what I did once at the Wern? Can I say this now? There is a foreman now Tommy Bartlett his name was isn't it? You know like sweets were rationed and he was always asking us for sweets reit? So anyway my friend – she was an awful girl and she said we'll have

him now Isabel she said. They gave him what's that thing they give you to go to the toilet and we put it in one of pockets and we knew he would go to pinch someone's sweets ad anyway he did. And guess what? - he didn't stop going to the toilet... and we made a song up about him as well.

Do you remember the song?

I'm not going to say it by there. It was comical but he said I never stopped going to the toilet we thought 'That will stop you pinching our sweets!' There was another foreman then. He would say 'Come on now, come on...' and we would say 'don't....' and one of my friends, she used to get upset about it. I'd say 'Don't worry about it man! Leave him alone - if he wants to shout at you just ignore him.' Oh - it used to be hard. I think the Wern used to be harder than the Mansel

0:31:25.4

Why was that then?

Well it was a different sort of thing all together. Shall I describe it to you?

Yes please, yes.

We'd start off with a block of aluminium – like that.

About a foot by a foot?

Yes - and then you'd be standing each side of the rollers one each side and then you'd push it through and then there'd be 2 women the other side then and then you'd have... it lifted the aluminium up and then come back again and you'd keep on doing that all the time until the length was... what length did I say?... well I'd say from the window to... I'm not exaggerating... well a bit further than the door

About 12 feet...

Yes. That was one of the jobs. Then after that was done then, they'd push it through to what they'd call the sheers and it was hot... it had to be hot for it to melt and then you'd be cutting that then and it used to be so hot it would burn your gloves as you was doing it. That was 2 jobs. There was another job then, what they called the scraper. You have the

aluminium and they'd scrape pieces of aluminium off it and you would watch in case it squirted in your face. We worked half an hour on and half an hour off because you couldn't do it all the time

0:33:03.2

Were there any fumes coming off the aluminium as well?

No fumes

0:33:13.5

What about heating and lighting at the factory what was the lighting like?

Yes it was well lit

What about heating was it too hot, too cold?

No I wouldn't say it was.. I think that was alright. Like I said it was half an hour off... we had a little room we could either knit or whatever and then go back.

0:33:58.1

What did you used to do then?

We was making a rag mat and my sister now, she was awful wicked my sister were... so anyway we had run short now of.. the pieces and we took somebody's coat off. It was the cleaner's coat it was and we cut it up and put it into the mat.

0:34:29.7

Was it her work coat.. it wasn't her personal coat was it?

That was my sister. Like I say you now.. there was camaraderie we were stuck there all the time and we had to have a bit of enjoyment... The best thing was she wasn't a very nice person see.

0:34:56.8

Tell me about the camaraderie then. What kind of things.... did you sing at work... that kind of thing?

In the canteen...

In the canteen...

They had a piano there.

Oh right... Would you sing dinner time? When did you sing?

When you were working in the mornings around 10 o'clock to have your breakfast and then the afternoon shift it would be around 6 o'clock.

So this would be in the Wern then?

In the Wern.

So who would play the piano?

Well someone working there who could play and we would have a sing song as well.

0:35:40.5

Do you remember the kind of songs you sang?

Well like er... (she sings) 'Show me the way to go home, I'm tired and I want to go to bed...' - that sort of thing you know.

0:35:53.4

Did you have social evenings there as well?

No well.... Christmas time - we would have a party Christmas time, but otherwise no.

Where did you have the party?

In the canteen.

During the day or during the evening?

It was in the evening.

What kind of things - would there be food and drink?

If you were lucky. We couldn't have much food when the war was on. They got fed up of corned beef and mash that sort of thing.

What about drink?

No we didn't drink only soft drinks.

0:36:48.5

Who paid for the party - the management?

Yes the management. I'd say that about it - he was a very good manager because I can remember once what happened. We had very bad snow and we walked all the way from Cwmafan – do you know Cwmafan?

No...

Cwmafan is about a mile and a half from Cwmafan to Port Talbot and then you walked over. But the manager he thought a lot of... that we had made an effort. We could have stayed at home but we made our way to get there and he appreciated that mind. I can't remember his name now. The other part Tommy we were talking about then and the manager then Les Thomas he was lovely. I can't find any faults. I was quite happy at the Wern, mun. Then it went to short time and that was it.

0:38:22.3

Why did you go on to short time?

Once the war finished they didn't want us anymore did they - naturally - the men were coming back. But that was the worst part though they were have much better pay doing exactly the same jobs, and they had more money than we had

0:38:42.7

So you were doing the same jobs as the men...

Oh yes...

... in the Wern but not in the Mansel?

In the Wern you were doing the same job...

Yes

...but you weren't getting the same pay.

Yes.

0:38:56.2

How did your pay compare to the men's pay? What did you have and what did they have?

Well like I say, I was having about £2 something for the week. That wasn't very much when you think about it working a full week. I'm not sure how much they had - they wouldn't show us. But I mean they definitely had more money than what we did.

Was it twice as much do you think?

Not much as we had I couldn't see how much? I couldn't say how much mind. I know they had more.

0:39:26.7

Was that a bone of contention? Was that something the women were angry about?

Well they weren't very happy about it.

As a group now you weren't happy?

Yes – well when you think about it we were working the same hours doing the same job and then what can you say. They cut our hours down.... and I left there then. I went to work in a canteen.

0:40:00.1

Did you challenge the management about the wages?

Oh no there was no point really.

(front doorbell rings)

0:40:10.3

What about the other facilities there both places?

You mean the canteen.

And other facilities like the toilets, that sort of thing?

No - we had nice toilets.

Tell me about them.

Well we had a rest room and the toilets were inside the rest room and they had the cleaners to come and clean them. Lil her name was. She was.. what it was.. she was a typical old maiden you know... you couldn't get much fun out of her that sort of thing. That was their job

they had shifts Her name was Lil – she was a Miss. Then there was Mrs Williams then - she was a different kettle of fish... happy and would have a joke with you.

0:41:14.3

Was it very noisy on the factory floor?

Yes.

Were you allowed to talk and things?

We used to mime.

Did you lip read?

Yes.

So you chatted away then?

Yes.

What did you talk about usually?

Men!

The men inside work or outside work?

O no.. we never bothered much with the men because you were in a different partment... they were the ones making the blocks of aluminium. No we never.... We weren't allowed to, to be honest with you. They were in a different dempartment to us. We'd see them in the canteen but we weren't allowed to go in the other part then. It was a bit dangerous – well they were making aluminium blocks.

0:42:14.8

What men did you talk about?

Well go to a dance in the night and the war was on there were men there everything.

0:42:29.3

Where would you go dancing?

There were 4 places in Aberafan; that's where I met my husband. There was the Con and there was the New Hall and St Joseph's where I met my

husband and the YMCA.

0:42:57.4

What kind of music did they play?

'In the mood' that sort of music.

Were they live bands?

Well in the Con yes... there's a thought. I don't know about St Joseph's - I imagine someone playing records. But I know in the Con. they had a woman on a piano and a saxophone and someone on the drums that sort of thing.

Were they all women?

No they were elderly.

Elderly men and women?

Yes they were people who couldn't go to the forces. There was another one too but it was built later on in the years that was. It wasn't far from the Mansel. It was belonging to the Mansel this hall and they were playing accordions - I can remember that now.

0:44:14.0

What kind of songs did they play?

You know modern ones init.

Can you remember some of them?

'I'll be seeing you', 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', what's that... (she sings) 'We don't know where we're going until we're there, There's lots and lots of rumours everywhere, we heard the marcher say, that we're on the road today we don't know where we're going till we're there.' ... that sort of thing. (she laughs)

You obviously enjoyed singing?

I used to not being big headed.. I used to have a nice voice I could sing 'One Fine Day' once.

Could you.. You've still got a nice voice - I can hear it.

My voice because I'm older its gone I can't sing anymore but I used to sing One Fine Day.

Puccini Madam Butterfly?

Yes funny thing one of the women working at the Wern she taught me the words she knew I could sing she said to me would you like to sing 'One Fine Day.' I said I don't know the words anyway she done it for me and I could sing it.

One of you co workers now?

Yes Stella. And we were very friendly we used to go about the place together as well. There was only one place I wasn't allowed to go in the war and that was down Margam Castle.

Why was that?

Because it was all Americans there. My sister said 'You are not going down there!' There was a lot of girls who got in trouble down there see. They went with young Americans init...., it was when the war was on there was always plenty of troops.

0:46:05.0

Were they staying in Margam Castle?

That was one thing we thought was very unkind. The Americans had Margam Castle. Well our boys didn't. They were shoved... there was one part..... do you know where the Bryn is?

No

It's about 3 and a half miles up towards Maesteg. That's where our boys were put. In Nissan huts. The Americans always had best. But the Americans didn't like the coloureds though.. even then when the war was on. They had that here, the animosity about the white Americans and the black ones. We thought it was terrible that they were fighting for them but if they were coloured they didn't want them. I don't know if it's still happening now, but it was rife then.

0:47:09.4

So you felt and your friends that the.... colour bar was terrible?

Yes

The prejudice against them?

Yes that was another thing I happened to talk to an American once and I

said to him "Where are you from - New York?" "Gee Ma'am" he said "I'm not from New York I'm from South Carolina!" There you go again the North and the South. Although they were fighting for the same thing, the animosity was still there because I thought he was from New York and he was from South Carolina. Have I gone off the track now?

0:48:02.1

No it's interesting...

I just wanted to ask you, what about smoking? Were people allowed to smoke in work?

I smoked. No - we weren't allowed to smoke on the factory floor but we smoked though.

So where did you smoke?

In the canteen or the rest room. I don't think many people didn't smoke then mind. I can always remember the first time I smoked. It was not a nice feeling in the beginning but we all done it see, it was like bravado. I did.. I smoked up until I got married and then gave it up as I couldn't afford it. I never smoked heavy mind, but I did smoke.

0:49:13.6

You know the women who worked were they mostly single?

No .

There were all kinds were there? And what about women with children – di they use to work in the factories as well?

Yes.

What did they do with their children?

Well must be their mother or someone to look after them

0:49:36.4

There was no childcare facilities?

No

0:49:48.

So.. I wanted to ask you about holidays...

Did we have holidays?

Yes - how many weeks of paid holiday did you have a year?

I don't remember having any to be honest with you..

What about Bank Holidays.... were those days off?

I don't think we did... I can't remember...

Was that because of the war do you think?

I imagine so no I can't remember any holidays.

Do you remember going anywhere on holidays?

No. Do you know I never went to Swansea!

What about day trips do you go anyway with the company or factory?

No, no, no no.

0:50:57.7

Did you enjoy working at the factory.... at the works?

Yes. I didn't like it at the Mansel but at the Wern - yes I didn't mind working there. I was there for 5 years.

You preferred it in the Wern although would you say the work was harder in the Wern?

It is a different sort of work really - you couldn't compare it really. They're all hard.

Did you think that the company and the bosses were fair were they good employers or bad employers?

We never thought much about that to be honest with you. We took it for granted. I thought the one in the Wern was very good. Didn't have much to do with the man in the Mansel... what's his name now... oh that's right Mr Cunleaf. We didn't have much to do with them. We had a foreman in the Mansel, oh love him, and he was stuttering he was. We used pull his leg really speaking. When we were talking he would jump up and down like that to get his words out. He was nice. There was only one. His name was Raymond Williams. He was a bit of a slave driver. If you sat down he was another one who would get up you know. In the Wern it was entirely different sort of thing see. As I said, you

were there for the half an hour and that was it. With the Mansel perhaps doing one job one day and the next moving you to another the next day.

Was the Wern was it working all the time you said there was 3 shifts was it working day and night?

Yes.

All the time it never shut?

Yes well Christmas.... no we didn't have holiday cos I mean whatever... if you had to work.... you had to work.

What about Christmas day?

No you worked the war was on.

0:53:33.3

Why did you decide to leave?

Because they cut my money down - I couldn't manage on what they were going to pay me.

They didn't actually take your job away they cut your money?

Yes.

And you went on to....?

I went to work to work in the canteen. That was hard work.

Where was the canteen?

I've worked in three actually.

What was the first one?

The Wern.

You went and worked in the Wern canteen?

Yes.

The money was better there?

Yes I was working a full shift I was only having about we went on the dole to help us out but we had to down every week we were working a couple of hours a week then you'd have to go down the dole office to sign on and it wasn't hardly worth it.

0:54:43.6

How long did you work in both the factories?

I was 14 and i finished working till 16 for 2 years then I went to work in the Wern for 5 years.

Did you ever work in the factories or works again?

No. I worked in the canteen.

So you never worked in a factory again?

Sorry... yes I did - I did I went to work in the Metal Box.

0:55:18.5

When did you go there?

Now that was fairly shabby. I was working in the Wern in the canteen and they said there was jobs going in the Metal Box and they started us there Christmas time and they sacked us in the Easter.

So you weren't there for very long then?

No because I didn't want to work there but they were the sort of people... they start you off they want extra staff which they never told us mind.... We couldn't argue and they finished us in the Easter and it was the best job I ever had!

0:56:05.0

Do you remember what your wages were?

Well a bit better to what I was having. About £3 something I know it was better than the Wern. They never told us. There was another woman she started with... the two of us started together and then they said later on that we were finished.

0:56:37.3

What year was it that you went to Metal Box?

I can't remember. I've been a bar maid as well.

Yes... but I want to talk about the factories. Was it late forties or something?

Well it was after the war I got married 1950 so it must about 1952.

So you went to work at the Metal Box after you got married?

Yes.

How did your husband feel about you going to work?

Good. Because he was working in the army, he wasn't having good money so I went to work.

0:57:36.0

What did you do in Metal Box?

Good question. On a machine making tins. Like lids for tomatoes, and something like that. They put them in this place to train you and then once they'd trained you they'd put you on the floor. Cushy job mind you. Easiest job I ever had.... and they finished us.

0:58:07.3

That was easier than the Wern then?

Yes they were very strict there mind. If you wanted to go to the toilet you would have to ask. And then I had given up smoking but they had a place for someone if they wanted to smoke. You would have to go down to this certain place for a cigarette.

0:58:32.2

What time did you start in the morning?

On shifts there 6 till 2.

Did you work different shifts... or just 6 till 2?

No 6 till 2 and 2 till 10

Did you work sometime the one then the other?

Yes

So you didn't work the same shift every week?

No

Did you have to travel far for that?

I was living down Giant's Grave then. I haven't always lived here. I'd catch a bus.

Was that public transport?

It's on the way to Neath. Now some parts are very noisy in the Metal Box but the place I was lucky to work it wasn't noisy there. Of all the jobs I had it was the only one I really liked.... and then they got rid of us.

0:59:52.2

Was it mainly women working there?

No there was men as well.

Doing the same jobs?

No the men were more for loading stuff and things like that where I was. I don't know what the other parts were like mind.

What about did you have to wear overalls or something?

No. You'd have to wear like an overall.

Did they provide it?

Yes - they were like a green colour.

How long did it take you to travel to work?

Not so far.... About quarter of an hour. Not far from here.

What about the camaraderie there?

Yes. Yes...

Was it as good as the other places?

We got on alright.

It was after the war now - how did you find the difference in work?

What friends I made they were ok but I wasn't there long enough.

1:01:23.4

Did you go out with them at all?

Not that much.

I suppose you didn't have any holidays as you weren't there long enough?

No and of course I had Susan then.

Are you in contact with any of your former work mates from any of these places?

No they are all gone now.

Looking back how do you feel about the time you spent working in these different places?

Wel... I wish I could do it again.

Why do you wish you could do it again?

I'm fed up with feeling like an old woman.

It made you feel full of life?

Yes when I look back I often wonder how I did it.

Do you miss the company the camaraderie that kind of thing?

Yes I made friends with a few of them and we did stay friends but they've gone now.

But you did stay friends until you lost them?

Yes.

You used to see them?

Yes they're all gone now. All gone.

Children now haven't got to find stuff to go to school. When I was young they had to find all your own books and stuff. Well of course living with my sister I knew that I couldn't

do it. And I had the brains but (?). I've got to laugh - when I was in School I came top of my class and I got a thing to show I was top and it has my father signature on it. I've still got it now. But there you are see, I wasn't encouraged see and I knew i couldn't do it. Before we left school we had to go to the headmistress and then she'd ask us where we wanted to go. She said 'Where do you want to go then Isabel?' and I said "I know where I'm going - I'm going to the Mansel." But I think she was a bit upset about it as well see. Because they knew I had it in me but they couldn't do anything about it. But there again see, even if you passed a scholarship, that wasn't much to do really speaking because you could only go to somewhere like Woolworths.

It's something you regret not staying... even though you knew you couldn't do it... It's something you would have liked to have done?

Yes. I had a nice voice and I wasn't encouraged with that as well. I'm not being big headed. I'd be out the back kitchen stirring gravy and I'd be singing at the top of my voice and my brother would say for "Christ's sake shut your mouth!" You see that sort of thing never saying 'Oh that's nice!'... always belittled. I can always remember going out with Cliff when I first met him on this trip with his mother. They ask you to go up and sing. I got up and sang his mother said I didn't know you could sing like that and I said "Yes I can!" That's the end of that.

66:05

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD CYFWELIAD