

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

Louis Edwards, Maesteg

Interviewee: VSE046 Betty Thomas
DOB: 1/11/48
Date: 16/4/14
Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's
Archive of Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru

NB This interview is on two files :-

VSE046.1.1 31 mins 13 secs and VSE046.1.2 1 min 15 secs

VSE046.1.1

BT was born in Caerau. They moved to Croeserw. Her father was a miner and her mother didn't work. She has one sister who's about 3/4 years older. She lives in Blaengwynfi. Her father worked in the Afan Blaengwynfi, Nant Howleth, Glyncorrwg - that area. he then went to work in the Steel Company in Port Talbot.

BT went to primary school in Croeserw. She passed her 11+ and went to Maesteg Grammar School and stayed there until she was 17. She got a bus to Caerau and then a train to Llangynwyd and walked from the train station to school. She says she had rheumatic fever for a year before her 'o' levels so she passed the ones she could swot but failed the ones that were practical. She was told to resit her 'o' levels at the same time as 'A' levels. She felt she couldn't cope with the work so she left. That was a disappointment because she wanted to teach.

03:29

She went to the job centre and found a job in the factory in the office. She had an interview for the job but doesn't remember a lot about it. She started work straight away. She was called a clerk telephonist but she did a bit of everything, including doing a bit of the wages on comptometers. She trained to do everything in work, on the job, by other members of staff. She went to work in Louis Edwards which was quite a big factory. She says there were about 8 or 9 of them in the office and thinks there were over 100 machinists. They made clothes for a variety of firms but she can't think who for. She says she didn't think about things like that at that age.

06:38

On the first day, she says she was mostly with Liz learning the telephone system. She answered the telephone and put the calls through. She went down on the factory floor and collected the tickets from the machinists.

"You went down on the factory floor and you went to every machinist and each garment they sewed they had tickets on. So you'd collect the tickets from the machinists and that's how you calculated their wages... That was the system of payment. They were paid a lot more than the office staff!!" The machinists were paid a basic wage and a bonus.

07:48

When asked how much she was paid when she first went there, BT says c. £5. That was 1966. When asked if her wages went up annually she says not by much. She was there for about 3 years and it wasn't much more when she finished as the beginning. When asked what she did with the £5 she says she spent a lot on clothes and used it day to day for travel expenses etc. She didn't have to give her mother anything. She says they were very good parents. She says she smoked in those days and she had to buy cigarettes as well. When asked how she got to work in the morning, she says on the bus. It was a 20-30 min journey to Maesteg and then she'd have to change in Maesteg to get a bus to the factory. She didn't start in the office until 9am so it wasn't too early.

10:00

BT says she knew nobody in the factory when she went to work there but made friends while she was there. She'd have to walk through the factory floor to go to the canteen or to the cutting room. She was always going from one place to another - it was part of her job. She says the factory was full of machines and the cutting room and the supply room would be separate. She says that they had a morning tea break, an hour for dinner and

another tea break in the afternoon. She says they were very good for breaks. She says she finished at 5.

11:52

She says that the women on the floor clocked in, but the office staff didn't. If they were late they just so and nothing would happen - they didn't lose wages. She doesn't think that they mixed a lot socially with people on the factory floor. She used to go out with Liz from the office. The factory used to arrange social events but she can't remember much except that it was a Christmas party. She can't remember where it was. She says that they didn't go out with the women from the office because they were all a lot older than them. Liz was about 2yrs older but the others were much older and were married. She says that when she worked in the supermarket she used to see 'everybody' from the factory, but since she's retired she doesn't see anybody.

14:40

BT says that there was no union in the office and she doesn't know if there was a union on the factory floor.

15:26

When asked about how much wages the women on the floor would make compared to the office staff, she says she can remember making up wages for £14 and £15, whilst she was only earning £5. She felt it was a vast difference especially since she "had the education!" She says that they worked overtime and they worked hard. However when asked whether she ever felt like crossing over, she said no. She says that she enjoyed what she was doing.

16:14

When asked to describe a comptometer, she says "it was like a typewriter, but it was all numbers. You had to multiply the numbers physically and that was it! Then you'd get your answer on the top and then you'd have to write it down... It was something I enjoyed doing - it was something different. I was always up for a challenge."

17:23

When asked where they went when they went out she says the town hall was popular. They used to have dances in the TH and 'monkey parading' around the town. They used to walk around the town and go into the cafes to meet boys. She says they had 'The Hollies' at Maesteg TH and other live local bands. She doesn't remember any of the local bands.

19:00

When asked if there were any disputes in the factory she says "No there weren't." She says that she thinks Louis Edwards were good employers. She says that she dealt with management daily. She says they were 'foreigners.' She mentions Mr Pereth, Mr Wison and a woman supervisor called Adie Elliott. She says that she was a tyrant according to the girls on the floor.

20:30

She says that the workforce didn't have to wear a uniform to work - just overalls and she doesn't remember any injuries on the floor. She says that they had a good canteen, the washrooms and toilets were clean. There were good facilities there and they made good food in the canteen and it was reasonably priced. She says that she could smoke in the office but they were not allowed to smoke on the factory floor. They could smoke in the canteen and the toilets. She says it was only 1 canteen for everyone and the lunch break was staggered. She says that she got home at about 5.30 in the evening.. She says that the men and women in the factory were 'friendly' and there was no harassment. There was a good working relationship.

23:27

When asked if they had paid holidays when they were working there, she says yes. She thinks it was 2 weeks but can't remember. She thinks they had holidays at the same time as the miners and the factory shut down. She doesn't remember a thing about bank holidays. She says that they didn't do much during the holidays because they couldn't afford it but remembers going to Butlin's once. She says there were no day trips organised from the factory. She says Mr Pereth was Jewish and had come from somewhere else but she doesn't know where. There were 3 factories together in Maesteg at the time - Louis Edwards, Revlon and Silent Channel which made car parts and rubbers for cars etc. (aka the rubber factory)

26:06

When asked why she left she says that she got married and had children and that people didn't go back to work then when they had children. She says that her husband didn't mind her working before she got pregnant."...but once the baby come along then it was my job to look after the baby."

She says that if women worked on they would sort out their own childcare facilities as there was no childcare facilities available in the factory. She says that most of the women who worked on the factory floor were a bit older. There weren't many youngsters on the floor. And they were predominantly married women, some of them returning when the children were older. They didn't work shifts but they worked overtime sometimes during the evening.

28:31

When asked whether she enjoyed working in the office there she said "Yes I loved it." She says she liked everything and she didn't mind going to work in the mornings. She liked the job and there was a variety to it. When she left she had two children straight away one after the other. She went back to work for Provident Personal Credit doing house calls, giving out loans. Then she went to work in Sommerfield supermarket on the tills and then she went to the cash office and became a duty manager. She thinks her factory office experience and her education probably helped her with those jobs. She didn't go back to a factory because the opportunities were elsewhere. She says that her time at Louis Edwards gave her experience, confidence and the ability to learn different jobs.

31:13

END OF FILE VSE046.1.1 / DIWEDD FFEIL

VSE046.1.2

BT talks about the wedding present she was given while at Louis Edwards.

"They had a tremendous collection - they must have - because they bought me everything possible in Pyrex! Tea service, dinner service, casserole dishes, fruit set... I had boxes and boxes. One of the boys had to take me home in his car cos we didn't have a car then isn't it. I think it was the supervisor from the cutting room Les, he took me home.... and I had 4 or 5 boxes all full of this Pyrex. Absolutely wonderful it was.... I couldn't get over it. It was a tremendous wedding present!"

"Have you still got some of it?"

"I've still got some of it - yes. Not a lot of it, but there's still some of it – yes!"

1:15

END OF INTERVIEW / DIWEDD CYFWELIAD