

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

British Nylon Spinners – Pontypool, Johnson & Johnson - Pengam

Interviewee: VSE050 Audrey Gray

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Archif Menywod Cymru

00.13 My name is Audrey Gray. My date of birth is the 9th October 1936.

01.14 *So tell me a little bit about your background. Your mother and your father, what they did for a living if they worked, and if you had siblings or not.*

My mother's parents and family lived in Rhymney and they moved down the Rhymney valley as the pits opened virtually, because my grandfather did work in the coal mining industry like everybody else did, but his main occupation was a piano teacher. So he moved where the people went and they came down from Rhymney to Bargoed and then down to Pengam, Glan y Nant – the other side of the river – it was Glamorgan then. Pengam where I live now, at that time was Pengam in Monmouthshire. We now are combined under Caerphilly Borough Council. My mother was to have gone to commercial college but because her mother died then she was to be at home to look after gransher and her twin brothers. So mam's education finished then. They lived in Pengam, then my mam got married to my father and they moved to Cefn Fforest, which is the other side of the valley and up a hill, and there they kept a small shop at the end of a street, and I was born in Cefn Fforest. During the War, because my father had work in the colliery and he had an injury and he weren't allowed to go back into the colliery with an injury as it was recorded, my father was deemed a person able to stay at home and look after my two brothers and myself. So mam was seconded down to Swansea when the war was on. She never talked about what she did, but I suspect that, from the little bits that I've gathered, she was based with some of the people that came to set up the area for the Americans coming over. So it was something that wasn't talked about. I know she had a friend who was fairly high in the WRAF part, it was a lady, but I think mam was probably doing the housekeeping for some of those people. It was a short time, then she came she back and unfortunately my father and mother then divorced so mam was at home to be the earner, so she did a small spell at Glascoed, I'm not sure what she did, whether she worked on the line or perhaps in the catering there.

And what was Glascoed?

Glascoed is ammunitions factory, down the other side of Cwmbran.

05.11 *So tell me about your brothers and sisters*

Two brothers older than me, my elder brother was an asthmatic which was treated only by herbal remedies then, because I can remember M&B tablet antibiotics coming in and they made such a big difference to Ray's life. Ray, said it was herbal, he used Potter's herb which was powdered plants and you burnt it and breathed that in. Otherwise we would go to the chemist, but his chemist medicines were in flagon pop bottles, really, because it was so. He had spent some time in a convalescent home then towards Llangorse, which was a big journey to go to, but it got better and he took iodine and egg that was to build his strength and things. So I did spend more time with my elder brother because he was in when I was little and I learnt an awful lot. He was quite clever and taught me things he knew like electronics, carpentry and things because he'd gone to the technical college in Bargoed when he was better and he worked for Powell Duffryn, the coal people, driving lorries. So he was one of the first drivers, which was interesting, and he would drive the coal to the farms in Hereford and when he would come back, depending on the season, but we always had apples. Come the autumn we would empty drawers in the bedrooms, and they would be stacked between papers with what we could get and we would be eating apples well after Christmas. Then he worked for a small colliery, the private one across in Tyr Berth. Their lorries weren't quite as good so Ray would often come and find a little bit of cellophane paper to put over the tail light if it had had a bump or something like that. He then left to go to work in BNS and that was my first introduction to BNS. Because the factory did open days for members of the family and you could take a guest or two, Raymond took me for the open day and we seen the site which was interesting and the labs there. I was in the grammar school studying to go to University was planned, but unfortunately Raymond and my younger brother Vivien announced their weddings at about the same time, which left me thinking of going into Uni and no income at all in the household.

09.04 Before we go on to talk about BNS, could you tell me about your education. Where did you go to school?

Primary School was in Flowers school, a stone building, 1904 was the date for it being built. When I started, because the war was on, we went to school I can remember thinking we went to sleep in the afternoon and I couldn't understand this. I wanted to go to school to learn, but because we were a bit younger, they start younger now don't they and that was of a part what would be the nursery perhaps now. There were a group of us that just went in a little bit younger. Some of the teachers had gone to war so we had a couple more ladies. The schools, the infant school was boys and girls but the boys had a separate yard for older. We had mixed classes but the girls played in one yard and the boys played in another yard. It wasn't fair because the boys had a flat yard and the girls had a sloped yard that went down to the toilets and I think probably there was an air raid shelter there but the toilets looked like air raid shelters anyway. School was fine - we had friends, the teachers tended to live in the village or very nearby and it was an easy walk from the house to the school up a hill. We walked up the road under two arches because the railway ran down and there were lots of coal trucks and sidings, the signal box was in the middle of two sections of line - one for passenger and the other for freight.

11.26 So tell me about going to secondary school

There was scholarship and at that time I didn't go into the scholarship class. Our class were a little bit younger entry. They changed the age to 11 after the 11 plus - there were about 10 or 11 from the class that I was in before the 11 plus who were 10 year old, but they were offered at that time two opportunities for sitting so members of our class sat scholarship at 10, where we would normally expect to go the following year at 11. Because of that, we were given that choice and the system was that the best of the Monmouthshire scholarship list were given the opportunity to go to Lewis' school on the other side in Glamorgan. So you did have two

choices, so mam had said you could sit next year for both but one was enough at the time. So we sat and we did have a very good rate, I think 10 or 11 passed out a class of 30 which was good, besides people that had sat from the 11 year old scholarship class as well, so we did have a very good intake but we had a lot of people that were under 11 as well. So I went to Bedwellty and we did the catch up thing all time there. Bedwellty was the grammar school for up the valley. As we came to doing O' levels we were then too young to sit O' levels so there were those group of people that stayed an extra year in school. Some weren't fortunate enough to be able to stay on to do that, which I think is a pity because they were bright and should have gone on really. So I did, like many of the friends and people from other schools as well, again about a group of 10 or 12 of us, to stay and do that.

14.17 *So you did your O' levels?*

I did my O' levels and I went into the sixth form – for O' levels I did chemistry, physics, maths, English, French - maths was as three subjects then: algebra, geometry and things, I didn't do art - all the science. And that was what I wanted to do, was to do science I was interested in atomic, and I was interested in space really and I think the head master had scheduled me towards going to metallurgy and physics – I did enjoy physics and found it relatively easy, but chemistry was my main love really.

What was the reason for that do you think?

I would say my chemistry teacher because, well practical - as I said I already was familiar with practical things – my father was a practical man, he made Christmas toys out of pit logs, a horse. They all could bring home a log, so there were logs available. Well that had legs on it and a head and a handle and wheels. And it was a toy, or an engine, and also he cobbled, he had a full set of tools. He did have a cobblers shop later on and I would go on a Saturday afternoon and watch him, well I learnt to use tools and things very easily, so practical. Our chemistry master demonstrated well - if you seen something you can know what to do with it really, and yes it wasn't only book work – it was seeing it happen and then to want to do it.

16.45 *Do you think your brother's illness as well would have had an effect?*

Because there was calmness I would think I feel through life, because I was with Ray I breathed properly because that was the thing he had to do.

I suppose what I meant was that it was a very exciting time in medicine

Oh tremendously and 'space' was coming wasn't it, it was science that was the thing really, I mean I did needlework and things and I enjoyed dress making and I did those, but we were fortunate in school. We did have excellent teachers, or at least the A classes did, the B and C well they didn't have perhaps the full time of the cream of the teachers. But our teachers were dedicated, they shared all the knowledge they had, whether it was within their subject or not. We had a debating society and a drama group that could have been, that were marvellous really. And in school we had the Eisteddfods and then they changed headmaster and they brought one in from England. He didn't think that Eisteddfods were quite as important because we gave up a whole week to the Eisteddfods, not just a morning. The evening things they didn't interfere with the lessons but the plays took up time. There was competition that would take place and you had to have evening events then, and the stage events for singing and recitation well were main events that did take perhaps a day or two but he felt that having academic results were more important. But no we learnt more through the things that the teachers ... the geography master, because we were coming into the time when were things like the Festival of Britain and things like that, we could have a trip. We went to Stratford and somebody brought a programme from an old student's society and on it were Richard Burton

and all these were young actors on the stage. There were about 10 of them on one programme, think my goodness it must be worth a fortune that one really, but we did. If we went on the bus the geography master had a sheet and said 'you are passing over the Chilterns or the Cotswolds', we were learning. Would take us to the source of the Thames and we could pick out a pebble there. Nowadays I know they do sheet stuff but then it was more interesting. It wasn't just something that was just run off - he did duplicate; we didn't have anything technological or computers but now .. but yes it was all calm and interesting and part of what he did and it was tremendous sharing. He did it for the people that were older than me. A lot of the boys did geology and I think again it was because the teacher was good. They went out to Africa and they couldn't do mining because mining was finishing here, so but they went to Africa and things like that, it was a lot to do with the teachers. Although he did geography he was a musician as well, the physics master played the piano for assemblies as much as the music master who came in later.

21.03 *You were destined for University, but then your brothers got ..*

Well, they decided to get married and of course there was no income.

So how old were you then when you left school?

I left a few weeks before my 18th birthday, the summer came I think the boys had said in July that they were going, well I had arranged to go with a camp with the cubs down to Ffontygary, and mam had said that have your holiday, go with the camp, come back and then we'll sort out what we're going to do.

How did you feel about having to leave school then?

Oh it was, I couldn't think of asking for grants I mean nowadays they do, but I didn't think, there was no income and mam had I think it was 5 shillings a week from the pension – Parish. Because my father hadn't worked, he'd worked for himself – he was a gaffer (indistinct) and he employed people then he hadn't contributed to what is now national insurance, so there was no pension for mam as such, because she hadn't worked long enough to do it, so there was what was the Parish as such really.

But how did you feel? You must have been really disappointed, were you?

No, I just, I would have had liked to have gone and I would have possibly done the metallurgy, because again the steel works were coming and being built. It was something but yes I would have liked to go – but no, I wasn't disappointed it was just my part to play and that was it, and as I said grants weren't (indistinct) somewhat.

23.26 *So you went to this open day, and how did you get the job in BNS*

Well I said I went to the camp, and it was August then that I went up to school I hadn't, I was planning to go back for the next year and I had all my books with me, all my text books, took them up to the school and seen the head master and said I was leaving and he said he was sorry and he asked what I was going to do and I said I was going to work now. And he said if you work in a lab, Audrey, you'll only be washing up bottles and flasks and you'll want to do more than that. Fair enough and I went from there, and the school is in Bedwellty, the employment office was in upper Bargoed. I went up and said I wanted a job, they made a phone call and they said I could have an interview in 2 days, I think in Pontypool. So I went out and had an interview and they said they hadn't really got a job for the main plant, the man is on holiday but you can start next week and wait till he comes back from holiday. So I went into a yarn test room for a week while he was on holiday and when he came back I went into a chemistry lab. And it was no different from that, the one little tale was that because the

schools the factories were wanting schools to be involved in the people, they had a visit from headmasters, the lab was excited really was as picture books as labs were then. We worked from 9 till 5 and in the morning you got your yarn and samples and did all your chemical bits and testing, worked your results out and then you washed up at the end of the day. You had baths that you put acid baths that you put all your flasks, so that they were scoured and then we had sinks around the back walls, deep lead sinks like this, with lots of hot water and then you scrubbed the things, teepol was our soap. I knew the headmasters were coming around and fair enough I was over on the far side, doors entrance to the lab were on that side. He's not going to see me because I 've got my back towards them. He walks over to the sink and there I am rubber gloves on, bubbles all over everywhere washing up oh Mr Gibson'! why didn't you come when I was all pretty an scientific but it was a good training in the lab we had standards and methods to follow.

26.47 *Tell me then about the training then, how long was it?*

The first week was only to keep me on the books, that was no training, but it was nice. They had a special training labs and everybody did I think it was 2 or 3 week there so that everybody knew what they were handling, and to be careful. Some people ran the ran Mr Appleby and Doug Alford and there were about probably 10 or a dozen at a time, no more and so we learnt what solutions we were using and the glass ware that we were using and how to handle that, safety instructions were there the fume chambers and such. It was good. And when you were considered right at the end of that time then you were sent down into the main plant lab. They did develop research labs further on but, and they did the same, there was. You followed routine when you were in the lab, You washed up everything in the night, in the evening, and the benches were all oiled and polished and totally clear. Nothing was left over.

28.36 *You called this a picture book lab, so can you describe to me how it looked the first day you walked into the training lab or the lab you eventually worked in. Can you describe to me why you called it a picture book lab and how it looked?*

Well there were large wooden benches with various pieces of apparatus and along the sides were small ovens or fume chambers. Different sections often lab did different testing. There was one for viscosity which you had water baths a bit like square gold fish balls and you had little bent tubes where your dissolved solutions, went through that and you timed it. The solution was usually pink and the white nylon dissolved in asformic acid was pink a little pink solutions on pretty designs tubes with a bit of a bulb in and you kept your water temperature controlled. You timed the time it took for a solution to go from one side to another and that calculation gave you the viscosity then that would be related to it. We had to slide rules which we calculated things with and big graphs were ... we put a bit of string from one end to the other and you got a reading from the result - it was time against viscosity, then your sheets were taken down to the process office and they got it another set of paperwork for records.

Was this the main lab now - not where you trained?

This is the main lab, that would be one section then there would be another one where got the asbestos bath to melt the polymer in that one, test tubes to see the moisture content, that was important again because of the strength of spinning and for taking up the dyes. There was one where we did carboxyl's you had hot plates a bit like that size and you had conical flasks on there, with the solution in and you melted that down and then took it over and titrated it, it would be perhaps white and you added another solution titrate, using a burette to change the colour, because the colour content would then give you another result, the carboxyl part of it. (Indistinct) was another test we did, and some we did in a fume chamber as well, but there

were noises bubbling, we had carboxyl one we had tube, thick large tube and you had a rod going done with a little windmill type compressed air stirring that one so that didn't look - Harry Potter wouldn't have done as good !

32.40 *So you had the sound track of a picture book lab?*

There were noises, there was the little windmill, it was unscientific it had a little cork and fins on it. Yes there were bubbling sounds and people worked did their own section. You were on one section for one time, perhaps you did change over every 6 months or something like that. And everybody did their own allocation, but come towards the end of the day if they'd had a busier time in one section, you'd find whoever was sat next to you would help. It was that the lab was clean and clear there was one half which did all those bits, then the other half did the raw materials. They would collect water from the streams outside to make sure that any waters going from the factory weren't going to affect the main brook that it ran into – the fish and things. They we dig the coal, because they used coal in the boiler house over the road, we tested all the coal, we had a lot of coal, best anthracite from there. So we did testing on that and the water again we'd use different indicators and there was titration. There was a section for oils where that they worked shifts on that one because the spinning finished and the yarn made a difference to them spinning. Because the production of the yarn was a continuous system, testing for that was continuous so the boys worked on shifts, no girls worked on shifts and in the factory floor I don't think women worked on the night shift – they could do mornings and afternoons but I don't think they worked on shifts in the night, for most of the time. That might of come in later on, but I don't think they did.

35.19 *Can I ask you about the smells in these different places, do you remember any of those?*

Oh yes, it was clean that was your whole point of it and controlled, there was a smell of the dust of the polymer occasionally, but only small. You had a fume chamber for when you dissolved some things, then all of that was extracted so you weren't in an unclean atmosphere, whether you walked out into the factory floor to collect your samples or deliver any messages or go up into there was a tower. What happened was, the polymer was brought in and it went up to the tower and then came down in the hoppers to go and be spun. So sometimes there was just that little bit and the spinning finish had a smell but it wasn't obnoxious, it was just because everything else was clean you would occasionally get that, but it was no more than a bit of hand cream or something like that it wasn't at all unpleasant, it was controlled. We had rubber doors so if you went from the corridor into a certain section of the production there was an airlock – there was a rubber door then a plastic door. You had an unclear door and you had a clear see-through door so that you was fine. The Queen went through those as well when she came to visit.

37.38 *Can you tell me, were you aware, of what each test you did was for?*

Yes, because that was part of your training, in the training lab you were explained and we did have a booklet and I was looking to see it, that told you what nylon was and how it was produced and what the chemical structure and for what the production was needed, you weren't expected to know all of it, but you did have the full background. It was more interesting because of that, I thought it was important and sometimes some people might not have absorbed that because they didn't have the same chemical knowledge in school perhaps, because girl's schools did not have chemistry labs. Hengoed school did not have chemistry lab like we had in Bedwellty. They used to come and sit their exams in Bedwellty, because they just were older and hadn't got to that stage really. Yes, training gave you all that, you knew and could understand what you were doing. We did have opportunities with the more chemical bits, and they might do a little bit of complicated things. There were people who did

that, so it wasn't only just the basics there were some people who would say that there was a special yarn that they were giving a bit of a try. Well you do that little bit of testing separately, and it was usually the people who were more able that did that.

39.40 *Did you enjoy the work?*

Very much, very much.

You talk about the women, how many women worked in the lab and how many men, how many of you were there all together to start off with? And then what do you think the percentage was?

Well, the lab had been going some years before I went. so there were girls working in the lab and the numbers - we were at least a third women, when you consider that there was the oiler section, spinning section that were all boys anyway because they had to work to shifts. In the chemical lab there were no girl supervisors, but in the yarn test lab there were because they were mainly girls, there were few boys working in the yarn test lab. We were the lab because we did chemistry and they were the test lab because they did testing. But they did things like dyeing and things as well, the lab had the lab manager, an assistant lab manager, it had a quality control that was people who the man that checked the samples coming from the lab for particularly for the continuing shift workers, because they had to go on. Then there were gentlemen who seen to all the raw materials, because in the lab we made up all our solutions from raw materials. Nowadays the labs have all the solutions made up at the strength they want them, so you have a bottle of if you wanted 5% sulphuric acid, but we had concentrated and we made our own from that. A number of the things were dangerous and toxic in their concentration form, but we handled them well. The formic acid which was the thing we dissolved nylon in so that we did if we wore nylons and we had nylons given to us which were for testing, because if you spilled a little bit then they just dissolved, they brought out blue lab coats which were nylon and I think they were intended for us to wear, we did trials on them and of course they didn't last very long.

So what did you wear then?

Terylene, a white cotton first and then we had blue terylene which was a bit better. So our lab coats would get worn, a bit dissolved when they were cotton now and again. The terylene was a different production, stronger - but it didn't. The cotton didn't last very long, depending which job you were doing. If you were doing a job without the solutions that dissolved, the acid, terylene was more acid resistant really. It would thin out, but it didn't dissolve in the solutions we were using.

43.56 *So did you have any other kind of protective clothing, like gloves or anything?*

Oh yes, gloves were two strengths. There was a thinnish one and a gauntlet one because as I said we cleaned some of the flasks in concentrated high strength sulphuric acid, and you had to put your hand into a solid rubber bath and you put your flasks in there and then took them out.

What were the gloves made out of?

They looked like rubber; thick, thick rubber and they were gauntlets. For certain jobs eye-shields were compulsory. The rules were there but they weren't ones that somebody was telling you all the time to do it. It was practice, standard practice - you followed that to do it and nobody said anything, but if you hadn't done it properly it would have been noted immediately and it would have been stopped.

So you were very aware of health and safety?

Yes, but it was our practice, that was didn't have to say rule number 1, 2, 3. It was standard practice for us all. What job you did you had the apparatus there for protection and you used it.

You knew it would be dangerous if you didn't use it?

That's right, if you used a flame it was inside the fume chamber and you had the fume chamber down when the fumes were going so that nothing came out. You had to put your hands in a little bit, that's all.

45.55 Do you remember any accidents when you were up there?

I had a small one; I can't remember any others really. But there was one of the flasks which we put on the hot plate, for some reason it just bubbled up and shot the solution and caught me on the face. But because we had a first aider down the corridor it was dealt with immediately. They took me to the hospital and I had no reaction at all, treated straight away. Because there were always we made up our own bottles of eye wash and blue solution. They were there and replaced even if they weren't used, they were replaced regularly made up to the strengths. Plastic bottles if anybody did get a little bit of a splash of anything then it was able to deal with.

Was there a nurse on site?

There were 2 nurses, and a surgery that was available for all the factory and it was very good. Staffed all the time, there were generally 2 people there. One of the ladies used to work on top of the colliery which was interesting, the doctors called in on a regular visit because our doctor from here did some visits there, if there was anything that needed attention then we had safety people in the lab did first aid anyway. You had one or two people there. There were opportunities for that and they had to be re-sat every so often. I was one at one time, Arthur was another boy, there was coverage for that at all times really.

So do you think they were they impressive then?

It was an excellent firm to work for. BNS had set a standard I think the people they employed were able and capable and also had standards, and it just ticked over like that really.

48.52 What about conditions, tell me a little bit about - not just the lab conditions, but the conditions of the whole place?

Whole place, as I said, it was clean and tidy. The condition was there, when I went to work at Johnsons the people from Yorkshire came down, no I went to Yorkshire for some training and they said the people in south Wales are on strike all the time, well of course there was some strike for the motor industries at that time and I said well no I can't remember the men ever going on strike. But I do remember one walk out and that was in an exceptional summer when the air conditioning wasn't working for a short while and then people had to come out because it was just too hot there. But that was the only for about an hour while they sorted things out, the conditions were good. There was only one time, but there was a lot of asbestos there because the steam was piped from over the other side of the road the tubing was covered with asbestos but it was covered a gauze on top of that as well, I think people it wasn't in the atmosphere, but asbestos was the protection that they did use for the steam pipes that went through.

People didn't know then.

No it wasn't neglect or shoddy work - it was just what was available then really. There were dangerous machines because they were fast running, but I don't remember anybody being hurt, there was steam about so there were precautions to take for that.

51.25 Did you have a lot of contact with people on the floor?

We did have to go and check the temperatures on the floor that was part of the lab's job, so we did a maximums and minimums and things - they stayed pretty constant. Sometimes we went on to the floor to go and collect our samples sometimes, big wooden trays to put them in, sometimes they'd bring them down to the labs sometimes we went to collect them. It was interesting if we did walk on because it was continuous spinning then if a yarn thread broke or something then all that yarn would go on to the floor and you would see a pile of it then and of course that meant extra testing for us. They would get men had special very hard pieces of hard wood that they could pick the yarn up with and do it round the fast wheels and so it would not catch into anything. All the apparatus that they needed for safety was there and being used well. Plus supervision was good they did have supervisors.

Did you make friends with anybody on the factory floor?

Oh everybody in the lab were friends. But it was my first time of knowing that some people weren't nice in life, they're just not going to be nice never mind where they are. That was something because we lived in the village and we knew the people and that one awakening and I can remember because my brother worked there he would occasionally pop in to the lab. The person one of the senior men wasn't my boss because he looked after a different section and I said to Ray he's not very nice and he said no. But he was nice to his wife who worked in the lab. It was my first time of meeting somebody that was cruel to people, he was a bully in many respects. He didn't get away it didn't affect the whole of the lab because the other people just were so good, but if he could find a weak spot and think he could do it. But everybody else was friendly.

54.24 How much contact did you have with people from other departments? Did you go out say in a gang of you went out was it from the lab?

From the lab and the corridor on which the lab was on the corner of. There was a corridor down there but that was offices, then there was a canteen then there was the instruments and fitters. When we went down to the fitters and instruments people because we had to check our watches against those, those were the main contact people, the canteen was in the middle of that. The social life was really the lab plus the people down the corridor who dealt with our results and things. The shop floors were shift people and their social life was according to their shift.

Were you seen like a cut above, was there a social divide?

No not at all, not even with research. When research was built as a new building and there were some very very clever people there doing some new inventive things, but the tennis team, table tennis and tennis, the teams from every section. The only division was because of the shifts and their spare time. That was the only thing that divided, no social club everybody was equal.

You didn't have people on the factory floor thinking you were a bit perhaps aloof?

No, no the people on the factory floor were genuine people they were people who had come from the mining valleys. They were travelling to work, they were pleased to be employed there, they knew they were doing a good job, they were paid a good wage, they were in good conditions and they could talk to their friends generally during and make friends while they

were there. No the only division was really the shifts, I did find when Cyril went to work for Exxon then there was a little bit there because they were on the site working for Exxon but because it was American management a bit it was a little bit different. But no the men that worked on the floors, because Cyril did a lot more of going onto the factory floor, they were - you respected people, never mind who they were. In the canoeing group the sailing group, we had main doctors that were there, and they were as friendly as anybody. The carpenter would come in and bring me half a dozen screws and somebody from the paint shop would come and say the varnish has arrived and things like that. I did go out with one of the boys from the shop floor, he was a fitter's mate, and I went out with two of the boys from the lab at different times. But friendships in the lab, yes a number of people, boys and girls married from the lab.

58.38 *How many of you worked BNS all together?*

It was thousands all together, because when they developed the research lab which was a big building. They developed the admin block which was, both of those were state of the art for that time, they are now standard class. Nice corridors, beautiful open plan, all rooms as suitable, beautiful. The lab was just beginning to expand a little bit but only in number of people after I'd been there 3 or 4 years they were taking in slightly younger people. When I went there were people off the shop floor that came into the lab or had just been asked to come in because they were given the opportunity, the shop floor people, to come in and do some work there on an equal basis to the people who were coming from grammar school.

When you worked in the lab were you, after this initial training, over the years when you worked there were you given extra training?

No, everybody was given the opportunity to go to night school and day release school that benefitted a lot of people because a lot of people from doing just their O' levels, some had come from doing their time in the services so perhaps they'd been interrupted. Most people took up day release.

Did you do that?

Yes, I did for a while. But i don't know why I stopped, probably transport was the thing because I worked till 5, if you were doing an evening class and then doing 6-7, I wasn't driving then and to Pontypool was I walked a long way to the station, got a high level steam train, over to Pontypool, then you got a bus from Pontypool, Clarence Street out to the factory service bus because staff didn't have transport. The shift people and the 7-4, the fitters and those people they had transport laid on, but 9-5 staff provided their own.

1.01.45 *What time did you have to leave home in the morning to get into work by 9am?*

About 7 o'clock - 7.15. It was a good 2 mile walk, a bit flat but a lot up. On some occasions because the station masters were good, I have seen them hold the train, and sometimes they did back the train up across the viaduct for me. I wasn't a good time keeper, they wouldn't do that these days. It's a cycle path and a walk now, the viaduct. From Clarence Street they caught the bus, but there was a bit of a delay between the train and the bus. Coming back we would do the same but often, in the winter, the station master had a fire in the office and we went into to wait. One of the girls made friends with someone from the offices and she lived in the house on the station and we would go in there for a cup of tea, then they set up a bus when enough staff from Rhymney and of course the winters were difficult; because Hafodrynys proved a problem for buses. People coming in from Newport never could understand how our bus could be late. We described our conditions, but they think they sound

like you come from a pass in Switzerland - well it was in the winter, because if something stopped on the hill everything stopped on the hill. We walked home from Pontypool in the snow most of the way or travelled in the car with some boys from the research and a ...girl was another. We pushed that up because coming out you still had the hill at the Jockey, before you got onto the main road - we had some interesting journeys.

Did you have to clock in when you got there?

No - there was a clock for the manual workers, but there wasn't a clock for us, the staff didn't clock in.

What were your breaks during the day?

We had a tea trolley that came round to the lab from the canteen. The boys from the lab would tease one of the ladies, because they would bring toast, an urn of tea and think they sometimes had some cakes. But the boys would want their toast dripping with butter. She only had a little distance to walk down the corridor to come to us, but she would bring extra butter, so she wouldn't get nagged, it was very good.

So that was in the morning, how long was your break then?

I can't remember - 5 or 10 minutes or something like that. You could have it in the lab but as I said when we did our results you worked on tables at the end of the lab which were away from all the chemicals, no food anywhere near the chemicals you could only take your tea break at the table, so you had a stipulated amount of time and you had it when the trolley came. And then lunch time down to the canteen which gave very good food.

How much time did you have for lunch?

45 minutes something like that. We certainly had time for our lunch in the canteen and because the grounds were so lovely the girls would usually go and walk round the grounds and sit on the benches or on the grass. It was nice to have fresh air, not that the lab was bad, it was just being out in it and flowers and trees and pleasant place, it was lovely really.

Did you have an afternoon break?

Yes, an afternoon tea break as well. But we didn't handle any food, it came to us in china mugs and urn on a trolley and certainly toast there might have been cake. I don't think we had toast in the afternoon, in the morning only.

Did you eat a cooked lunch, was the canteen subsidised?

Yes I think the shift people had it even more, they had a ticket or something and the canteen was virtuously continuous. Staff had their times and the shifts had their times because they started at different times of the day. We used the same canteen. Research and the blue collar workers had a canteen in admin but our lab bosses they used the same canteen, special occasions then they would go if they were entertaining or had visitors then they would use special - the chef was magnificent. Cyril did it if there were other people coming in, buyers.

1.08.35 *What about other facilities - the toilets, rest rooms things like that?*

We had a toilet for the girls and a cloakroom easy pegs, lockers and sufficient toilets and hand basins, mirror. The boys had similar facilities I think. We had a small storeroom and then we had 2 cleaners in the room that cleaned the floor of the labs and they provided us with dusters, all the dusters that we used were white so there were large linen baskets that would be delivered, with all white cotton garments all the garments, all lab coats, the dusters

were white so that if anything was on them we could see what was there. We oiled the benches at the end of the day and we used the dusters for that everything was visible and the men took time to cut them up and present them. I have a little Welsh ladies cap that was worn under the tall hat and it is with lace because we would have beautiful cotton petticoats with all lace trims and lots of old stuff that had come in and one of the boys said I think you might like this Audrey he got his rags for the day, it is the finest lace and the stitching on it you can barely see that was in the laundry basket for our cloths. We did use up an awful lot of good things that would be antiques today and treasured, but it had to be white cotton.

Where did all that stuff come from then?

It was bought in for dusters for the lab.

1.10.59 *Can you remember how much you were paid at the beginning?*

We were paid monthly all the staff, I'm using the word 'staff' I didn't when we were working there, but for the people in the lab. Other people were staff, the office people were they had a typing pool at one time but that reduced then. We had another little office where two girls were, they were typists. We were self-sufficient. How much I was paid? My first monthly pay was probably about £20 but because I'd worked 3 weeks rather than a month it was 3 weeks I had, but in the order of £20 - I might have had just under.

Was this when you were training?

It was the same because the training was only for 2 or 3 weeks, but first pay was around £20. We paid superannuation and you could pay optional sports and social, not very much, don't know whether it was 6d or something like that, that would have been the maximum, so I did. We had national insurance taken out and tax.

Did you have a pension?

Yes that was superannuation, because I left work to get married, well not to get married, but because I was going to be married in a short time, I was engaged. So we had shares given in BNS or ICI, our superannuation we paid in and which was our pension but we were given shares, or did our pension go into shares? We had the shares with certificates; we sold them it must have been with ICI not with BNS.

Did the company contribute to the pension?

Yes, I can't fully remember how much but it was fair. I think they paid 2/3 and we paid 1/3. If not it was fair it was good, and certainly for the time it was very good. Because we were married and I was leaving I was given the amount of money I'd paid in. Whereas if I had worked longer and to pensionable age I could have had more. I couldn't have what the company paid in I could only have what I'd paid in.

1.14.59 *Were given a pay rise regularly?*

Yes, pay rises were you had a yearly assessment, you generally stayed the same. If people had a couple of birthdays or something or gone on to a section that was doing a bit more research work then they would have had a pay rise. You worked up to a certain amount for your age. There was a bracket, but mostly it was fair. Most people progressed because people came in and went up a little. I didn't I don't think because I didn't work on the sections that warranted it.

That initial pay you had was very good, wasn't it? How did it feel to you at the time?

Well at the first one yes, my friends who had gone to work earned less in Switchgear in the offices. Nobodies pay was high then. It covered my expenses for travelling which was considerable. My first one covered my season ticket to go to work, it was cheaper and I can remember Vivien giving me my money to buy my season ticket rather than buy a weekly or whatever, so my first pay virtually paid for my season ticket. After that it was fine. We could live on it.

1.16.55 *What did you spend you pay packet on?*

Transport, not extravagant. Some of it was for housekeeping because it was the wage for the house.

Did you give your mum the money and get some back?

No, there was an amount set aside and I had money that was mine and mum had money that was hers or the households. We shared really.

So what did you do with your bit of the money?

Spend money on - I did I was involved in cubs and rangers, social things, clothes obviously. Nothing out of the way. We did go on holiday - with a friend to Paris. The first year of working, but my friend was always economical - she had a book from the library called Paris on the cheap or words to that effect. It was enough to do all the things that I wanted to do. I did go to the cinema I didn't drink or spend on other things. Did I save? I only saved for an item that I wanted I didn't save to have money in the bank - but that was a point you never really did draw all you money out of the bank, but if you have a pay packet you've got it in your hand haven't you? So there was money, the end of the month was always more difficult when it was a 5 week month. February was quite good, we were paid on the 25th but I think the money went in the bank about the 23rd. I started work with bank account and I haven't changed it since.

Did you have paid holidays every year?

We had 3 weeks holiday paid. No we had a fortnight, but you there was a shut down for the factory for a fortnight, the first 2 weeks in August they were more or less obligatory. Because I was interested in scouting there were times when I would want that time off. It was difficult to get your time off as well you had to book your holidays, if you wanted any specific dates and you were more or less told to have the shutdown week. We must have had 3 weeks at some time because there was a little bit of variability.

What about Bank Holidays?

You didn't work bank holidays as staff. The other people had to work some but most people on shifts, it was the first time I'd encountered the seven day shift system, and because my brother worked it it governed other things as well. The men in the pits and factories used to work mornings, evenings and nights 5 or 6 days a week. In BNS it was 7 days a week people worked, but they changed the shifts - 3 shifts but you had four lots of people, because one person shift was always on rest. It was a different system for the shop floor; it was different to what people in this area were used to.

1.21.38 *What did you do for your holidays; you said you went to Paris once, what did you do?*

Went to Paris, to Wales because I loved Wales, so whatever holidays I had I wanted to use part of it to Wales. Went to Towyn that was interesting! Went with Guides to Switzerland, Italy and things - not extravagant we were fortunate that one of the guiders should have

opened her own tourist office because she was so good at it. You had what you could afford in accommodation and it was interesting. The abroad trips were with the Guides, holidays with mam perhaps caravan. We didn't have a lot of holidays, they went too quickly.

1.22.52 *We talked about strikes - can I ask you about trade unionism, were you a member of the union and what union was that?*

Yes, ASTMS - Association of Technical and Management? Perhaps?!

And was there a union on the factory floor?

Yes, there were different unions on the factory floor.

Was everybody a member?

Everybody had the opportunity of being a member I don't remember any compulsory ones. My husband was a delegate for the ASTMS and we had a representative in the lab, I don't remember much in the way of union meetings because we didn't have any main causes

And would you say that for the whole factory, you don't remember disputes?

No, there were times when they questioned something, but nothing big.

1.24.21 *So on the whole do you feel that people were fairly treated?*

Exceptionally, they were fairly treated and that was exceptional when there was a bad time, as I said the motor industries in particular were going through lots of things, you could speak to your boss if you wanted and some people did. Mainly if they wanted a special day off and they would like to change and do something and the boss would speak to you as well. There were opportunities given

So there was good dialogue?

Oh yes. I went to a major trade fair in London, they had a ballot and BNS were doing something rather special in it and the opportunity there were 4 tickets to be given by a ballot and draw, and it didn't matter whether you were the best or the worst person there. It was fair. I was fortunate, another boy from the lab went and a couple of people from research, it was all fair. There were some redundancies made in the lab and there was a little bit of people saying 'why me and not somebody else' - but I think that was to be expected. Most of the people went on and got jobs elsewhere and they were ready for it really because they'd come in perhaps with only school qualification. They got more by going on day release and then Llanwern were taking people and a number of them went into teaching as well. So it did open the ground, and when the redundancies finished, they were giving opportunities to younger people coming in from school from the secondary moderns, so that they benefitted from going on the day release and things like that.

1.27.02 *Why do think that there were redundancies?*

Because there was more automation. The shop floor got computerised and so with the computerise it didn't need the extra person in the office looking after the books, or sample taking.

Can you tell me about the social life?

Excellent. The social club was a special building it had everything there, but besides the building they had a small pavilion as well. Every sport was catered for tennis, bowls, shooting they had a rifle range, skittles and sailing club, table tennis, billiards, and still a ball room that was magnificent. A lounge where they served meals occasionally as well. Most of the things were adaptable, there was ball room dancing classes. I and a couple of girls from the lab did basketry work in the evenings. There wasn't anything you couldn't do really.

What did you do?

I did basket work, I did sailing club, I played occasional tennis, they had teams of football, can't remember a rugby team.

What about night outs?

There were special occasions because the shift people organised big dances with all the big names there with different styles of things. Each shift would do something a little bit different. There were special occasions, the ball room would be decorated if it was Christmas, one shift did up had better artists than the others and it would be like walking into Disney carnivals pictures on the wall it was lovely. You knew you would get more of a social relaxed evening with one shift than another, but they were all good to go to.

And could you go to any one of them?

Yes, you had to have a ticket.

And were some parties better than others?

Yes, I would say perhaps D shift would have had the more relaxed fun one, and A shift would perhaps have all the top name bands or would definitely have one top name band,

Do you remember any of those?

They had a big ball at one time for special events as well - that was marvellous. Who plays something on the shore, clarinet? - Acker Bilk - I can remember him because people would go because they liked a dance or they would go early and they'd dance. I would say that people danced from the beginning, from the start of the evening to till the end of the evening, it wasn't only just 3 people on for the first 2 hours and then everyone for the last dance. But when Acker Bilk played that, everybody on the floor stopped and that's the only time that I've known the ballroom stand still or be empty, it was magnificent. But there were other celebrities as well - they did special events like long service awards where they were transform the ball room into a Mediterranean or whatever they felt, it was a film set to go to that. Within the lab and the corridor we would have our own shows at Christmas parties and such like and entertainments was like a pantomime or a music hall, we did all dress up and in the lab we did have access to materials and on the site we had access to because TDD which was textile development where they tested all the fabrics that had been made up and you could get a bit of fabric from somewhere. We had black velvet and nylon, white nylon knitted stuff regularly so we could use quite a bit in making costumes. And they did them very well. We had one or two people who were good entertainers. All the boys made fun or helped to make fun they didn't mind dressing up in old corsets and things. Skiffle was about the time then, we had some people come in from somewhere in England, it must have been when ICI came and I can remember one boy, Cyril's friend as well, they made their own skiffle group with tea chests and wash boards and such like. We had tremendous fun and there would be once or twice a year lunch times, we could go to the garden or across the road to the Waun-y-Clare, we'd go to the club occasionally depending how much time we had. Special occasion for somebodies birthday we'd do that. Girls from the lab we still meet. Smaller numbers now.

1.33.55 *I was going to ask you that – if you kept in touch with them, and what do you do now?*

Now we go for lunch in Cardiff, because one comes from Caerleon, one from Blaenavon, one from Croesyceiliog, myself, one from Caerphilly, one from Ebbw Vale. We used to be about 14 going out, we're down to 6-8 depending on what's available. But that's a long time really. Because I left earlier i wasn't so sure if we'd keep contact, but I am still on the list and I still go.

1.34.47 *I am going to ask you about that now - so how long did you stay in BNS?*

Think it was about 13 years, 12-13 years.

So we're coming to the end of the 60s here then?

Yes.

And you went to work in?

Johnson and Johnson

And what did you do there?

I was a quality controller, in the quality control lab. Johnson and Johnson produced J cloths there, non-woven fabric. I was in the cloakroom one day and I'd taken my paper into work with me, sat down for the end of the break and we did use a cloakroom for a spare five minutes.

Cloakroom in BNS?

Yes, and in the day you could have a little break if you'd finished, some five minutes in the cloakroom, not off the site. I was reading my paper and there was an advert for Johnson and Johnson quality control labs, they were opening a new factory. I read it and said that's only on my doorstep I'd only have to walk from my house up the hill. Up the lane onto the top road. So I filled in an application form and Cyril and I were on a pony trekking holiday when they said the interview was, so it was only in Llnwyrtyd so came home for the day, so that I could take the interview. I think mam was impressed I'd come away from my holiday for the interview. They thought I might like the job and gave it to me. That was testing again mainly raw materials and the fabric.

1.36.52 *How many of you worked at Johnson and Johnson?*

In the lab - strange enough 2 girls from TDD in BNS, were working there when the job that I had (indistinct) there. 4 boys, at least 2 of them were from BNS, one was an ex policemen but he'd left there because the hours weren't right and he had a young family. A number of people from BNS went there because they had labs on the floors as well, couple of boys from BNS were working in those labs, I wouldn't know how many were on the shop floor in Johnsons, but the lab was only less than 10.

So how did you feel about leaving BNS?

Well not to have the journey was something and because Cyril was my boss it wouldn't have been good if I'd worked under him if we were married.

And you'd just got married did you?

No I was getting married that year. So I knew that I would have to change at some time, from BNS.

But that's the practical thing, how did you feel in your heart about leaving your first job?

All my friends, because we were friends there was a little sadness, as I said on one of the photos the book that Cyril had chosen for me, that made me a little sad. He knew I liked Gwyn Thomas and as it happened Gwyn Thomas had published some selected excerpts. It was a beautiful title for me to have and it was a selected excerpt. So I left with good will and I was happy to start a new job really. So there was no, because Cyril was a contact for me and the girls did it on their own. Although I'd left work at BNS and worked at Johnsons for about a year before we were married, Cyril came home (I wonder if I still have it) it was tradition that we would do something special for everybody getting married. Well I had a folder and one of the boys had written a poem for me and somebody else had made drawings and cut outs of things that were relevant there. So they needn't have done it for me, they could have gone something for Cyril but he was one who didn't want any fuss. But they had gone to a lot of effort and so I was very pleased with that. All significant as well, lovely, big surprise - all hand made. I made dolls for them and sometimes we'd dress up people, good fun.

1.40.36 *So what were the conditions like in Johnsons - was it a new factory?*

Yes, a brand new building, but it did surprise me when I got there because they had brought old machinery down from Yorkshire. I again went up to Gargrave in Yorkshire for 3 weeks training, now you say you felt outside the boundaries, bit insular in like coming to this little part. In Gargrave, the ladies who were working in the labs there, were even more - so they didn't know nothing. They were about to retire and because Cyril's brother lived in Yorkshire and we would go up there often and they were very much thought that there was something interesting in the area and they could see it, and so they were often thunderstorm in the night, get up in the morning and the sister-in-law say 'Well the rivers going to be a flood and we'll see it - so there's your sandwiches, there's your flask, take the car take a ride to see the water'. And so we did see quite a lot and I knew a bit about Yorkshire, but they didn't know more 3 or 4 yards I reckon by comparison, of their area. Because they were going to go and see all the things, that I knew about, when they retired. And they had a strange concept of Wales as being a strike ridden place. But they brought down all the apparatus which I thought was awful really, because BNS' stuff was always very good, was a bit temperamental.

1.42.39 *So did you enjoy working there as much as at BNS?*

No, because it was different management, people didn't quite know what they were doing, and there wasn't quite the same - it was open plan offices and they hadn't built the comradeship that I'd experienced at BNS. They didn't have the set rules, the methods, for starting you had to make your own up a bit. One of the girls that was working there, I'd met her some time ago, she'd gone to the civil service to work. She hadn't had an MBE but one of the civil service awards and of course a lot of those go not on merit but on time service, well she had only been there a short and she'd had an award. She felt that the people would be upset because she hadn't worked there as long, and her boss said no you've done it because of your methods and your consistency and she attributed that to BNS and ICI. That we'd had a grounding that set us off right and that was the thing and the same applied to one of my other friends who left the lab and worked in Cardiff in the University labs and again she said it was that she understood what she was doing, she could make the solutions she wanted, she didn't have to go out buy it, she could start from scratch if necessary. All of that was down to good training and good policies and good practice totally.

And you'd developed a rigour?

It was a standard and you went with it. That was very important, both those experienced that, and I did as well because for the testing I was doing then I made the grafts and things so when something went wrong or when the supplies came and queried something, then I could bring out the maps, the grafts that I had, and all my records and say well this is what we've done we've tested every day it's recorded every day, you have all the information that you want. And the boss looked at it and said when did you do that, nobody told you to. It was part of the testing, you've got to put your material down, that's what I learnt and I'm grateful for that. I think school did a bit of that as well.

1.46.10 *How long were you working in Johnsons and Johnsons for?*

Not very long because after we were married, my daughter came quite quickly and I worked a little bit but I didn't want to be because I would have to go onto the shop floor to collect samples or take results and things. I didn't want to be pregnant and walking through a male environment. They did employ women, but on half shifts, and they did employ some people who weren't very able – but not physical disabled. It was part of their bit to society as such, and they counted out boxes that they made, incontinence pads and things like that. So they had girls on a line counting out boxes and I went out one day and one of the girls had stopped to say hello and I think I was the first person to have spoken to her, and I thought that was a pity. They had management, they could walk round and say hello, but no-one gave them credit for what they were doing and it was pretty monotonous. One of the things when I was there, people would come for interviews perhaps at our tea or lunch break, and they'd send them into the canteen to fill the forms in and a number of them couldn't write their names and addresses - they were looking able otherwise, I felt sorry because they couldn't fill their forms in. I grew up with a piece of paper and pen so you could write. There were always magazines or bits of paper, you did practice writing your name and address. So that was something that was different.

1.48.47 *Did you ever go back and work anywhere else?*

Yes, when my daughter was starting to grow up, my neighbour was doing some survey work and asked would I like to do some. So I did some survey work, I did some for when the European market was.....

You didn't go back and work in a factory?

No, not in a factory. I did sell sewing machines in the big Co-op store in Pontllanfraith and I did some merchandising there part time, when my daughter was in school and growing up.

1.49.52 *Looking back on your work in the factories, how do you feel about the time you spent working in the factories?*

I think that I enjoyed it I certainly enjoyed the company, I liked the work, I liked working with the chemicals and developing things. I think I was fortunate to be able to go there to work because there went very many labs. The alternative was the coal board labs in Ystradfawr and I suspected that there may have been rodents around and I am very fearful of them. That eliminated that side, it had to be a clean lab and I would have liked to have gone to Hartwell but that was a bit further away. It would take me outside of Wales and I don't know whether I would have wanted that.

111:01

END OF INTERVIEW / DIWEDD CYFWELIAD