

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

**Polish factory - Pentrebach, Kayser Bondor – Merthyr Tudful, AB Metals – Abercynon,
Beecham's factory - London**

Interviewee: VSE069 Kathleen Matthias
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Interviewer: Catrin Edwards for Woman's Archive of Wales / ar ran
Archif Menywod Cymru

The interviewee identified herself as Kathleen Matthias. Kathleen was born on 16.4.1940. Kathleen's father was a miner, her mother didn't work. One of Kathleen's sisters worked in a shop, another in a factory, another in the telephone exchange. Her brother was in the Royal Navy. One sister is living in South Africa, her brother and one of her sisters is deceased. The youngest sister still lives in Merthyr. Kathleen went to school in Aberfan junior school, the school that was destroyed in the Aberfan disaster. Kathleen passed her 11 plus and had a choice of where to go next - Kathleen chose Pentrebach Technical School. She was the only one in her school to go there. Kathleen left school in 1955, aged 15. Kathleen went to work in the polish factory in Pentrebach as a junior. The polish factory was situated two or three old corrugated army huts. They made polish there and firelighters.

What kind of polish was it?

Really don't know.

Was it boot polish or furniture polish?

Furniture polish I think, but I don't know. I worked in the office there and I worked there for about 9 months I think.

How many people worked in the factory?

20 or 30.

On the floor then?

Yes.

How many of you in the office?

(2.40) Four of us.

Did you have to have an interview?

Yes

Do you remember anything about it?

Not a lot, no.

Did you go with anybody you knew, or did you know anybody...

Yes, I knew two of the girls working there. One was a friend, and the other was in school at the same time as me, but in an older class. But I did know them vaguely. But the one I did know. She got me the job more or less.

Was she working in the office with you?

Yes.

So you were there for 9 months?

Around 9 months I think.

Did you mix a lot with the people on the floor?

Not a lot, not in the polish factory.

What kind of facilities did you have there?

I can't remember a canteen or anything like that. We usually had our dinner in the office, and tea in the office. I don't know if there was any canteen there, I can't remember. But we didn't mix very much with them. We didn't have a lot to do with them.

So how did you get to work in the morning and what time did you have to be in work?

9 o'clock. Bus from Aberfan up to Pentrebach.

Right, and was that a public service bus?

Yes.

(4.09) Did the people on the factory floor start at the same time as you?

No they started earlier.

Did you have to clock in in the office?

I can't remember.

Do you remember about breaks and things?

I think we had an hour for dinner, and I think we had morning and afternoon but I'm not really sure about that.

So when you were in college what did you train as?

I started training as a shorthand typist. We were the first ones to start in the new college in Merthyr, which they've just pulled down. But I didn't get on very good with shorthand and the job I took involved typing at the time, but I didn't really like it. But I always wanted to do office work but when you're a junior, you just do filing, you just do anything that they ask you to do.

So did you enjoy the polish factory?

No, not very much.

Why was that then?

It was dark, it was gloomy, it wasn't a very nice place to work.

So is that why you left?

No there was better money in the next factory.

Tell me about the next factory then.

I had an interview for Kayser Bondor working in what was called the ticketograph office. I got that for a few weeks, but it was a very big office with about 40 people, but three different departments there. Accounts were in the first half, then the ticketograph, then the wages out the back. I didn't like the ticketograph very much. I found it very boring.

Can you explain to me what it is?

When you're sewing garments, you get tickets, so every dozen that you do, you get one ticket for. Then they are given to the wages department with a sheet showing how many you've done that day. You were paid for how many garments....how many dozen garments you had done. That was their wages. The ticketograph then counted all these tickets - it was a kind of stock taking so

they knew exactly how many garments were in the factory and everything like that. But I found it very boring and repetitive, so within a year I wanted to move to the wages. I'd watched them working and I realised that was what I wanted, so Kayser Bondor sent me to Cardiff to go on a (unclear ?) operators course. Six weeks course I think it was. If you paid for it, it was a longer course, but they paid for it so it was a quick course. (7.09) I transferred to the wages department then and I stayed there for most of the time then.

Tell me about the course - the comptometer course then?

It was in Cardiff, Queens Street, and it was somewhere near James Howells, and a lot of girls there...do you know what a comptometer is? I think it was a prelude to a computer.

Explain to me.

It was like a small calculator where you worked in decimals which was long before decimals came in, and it was very fast it was. You just had a number of numbers and if you wanted to do 3 by 24, you just went along like that! It was before computers came in but they were very very fast working, and that's about all I can remember about comptometers. You worked in decimals and it was long long before decimals came in. Then you worked out the wages from that. Every day we went down to the factory, you had this little box with you and each had a section. Each girl in the wages had a section of girls working there and each day they gave you their tickets of how much they'd done that day, you'd have different process for say underparts, gussets, side seams, elastic and if you were doing the folding they'd do so any a day and that was how their wages were worked out. They'd give you a ticket to say they'd done 6 dozen a day, they'd give you tickets for 6 and you wrote down how many each day they'd done, and then the wages were worked out from that for the following week. Well, the following week, because you were a week in hand. But every morning we had to go down to take their tickets so that we could start....you know, we were obviously working on last week's wages but you still had to do that every morning before.... you did it ready for the next week.

(9.26) You said that you did this course in Cardiff, did you find that you had an aptitude for figures do you think?

Yes.

Did you know that when you were in school?

No.

So it was something you found out?

Something I developed later after school. I found a lot of people do that. They don't really know what they want in school and it's usually after that they find out, because I wanted to do

shorthand typing. I mean I can still touch type now because I was taught it, but shorthand, no! I couldn't get into that at all.

(10.06) So you went on this course for 6 weeks - did you enjoy it?

Yes.

Did you know other people on the course?

I didn't know anyone when I started but I got friendly with a girl who came to work in Kayser Bondor after and we were friends. In fact I heard the other day that she'd died. I hadn't seen her for years, but I got friendly with her on the course, we went out to dinner together and then she started working in Kayser Bondor a couple of months after. She paid to have the course she did, but I had never heard about it until I went to Kayser Bondor.

Was it something that Kayser Bondor did - to pay for people to go on courses? That's really good isn't it?

I enjoyed my time in Kayser Bondor, and if you meet anyone now50 odd years lateryou'll still talk to them as if you only saw them yesterday. There's a ...I don't know what it is, but I'll see somebody in the street and I'll go 'Kayser Bondor, I know you from there'! And that's 50 odd years later.

How did you get down to Cardiff for the course?

Train.

How many hours a day was it?

Pretty full. It was 9 til about 4 o'clock.

(11.38) Did you enjoy the time on the course?

Yes.

So you went back to Kayser Bondor then so now you were fully trained were you so you could start work straight away in the wages department?

And I worked up until I was a supervisor there. My last job in there was a supervisor, until I went to work in London.

Tell me where was Kayser Bondor when you were working there?

In Pentrebach at first, and then they moved the factory up to Dowlais.

So how did you get to ...

Bus.

The same bus?

First one bus to Pentrebach, and when they moved to Dowlais then we had to catch two buses. So I'd start earlier in the morning. I think I caught a bus about quarter to 8 and the bus waited in Merthyr then for about 10 or fifteen minutes and then it went up to Dowlais after.

When you were in Pentrebach when did you have to start work in the morning?

9 o'clock.

Tell me about when you first went to Pentrebach. How big was Kayser Bondor how many people worked there? In Pentrebach now.

About a thousand. It was a big factory there.

How did you feel when you walked in the first day?

Nervous.

(13.02) You'd come from a very small place hadn't you?

Very. To go down to the factory was very nerve racking because it was noisy, loads of machines, rows and rows of machines, and very noisy. You felt a bit umthe factory girls, some of them were very nice, others were a bit rough! So you did feel on the defensive when you first went down there but after a while once you knew them, you know, we were all on a par. We weren't office girls with factory girls it was all..

Did you have to go and collect the tickets?

Mmm.

So you had to interact quite a bit then did you ?

Yes. Every morning.

What time did they start in the morning?

About 8 o'clock I think. Yes, I think so. We all finished the same time at 5.30 and there was free buses brought us home. They had free buses in the morning to go to work. We obviously had to get our own selves there, but coming home then there was free buses all the way home.

So a free bus down to Aberfan?

Yes. Dropped you off.

So how far did these buses go?

Treharris I think. I don't know if they went o Bedlinog, I don't know. Treharris.

How far away if people come to....

Rhymney, there was a lot from Rhymney there. I don't know about Aberdare. But I know there was a lot from Rhymney , that area 'cos I worked with a few of them from up there.

So what were your breaks like then?

Breaks in the canteen. I can remember them more up in Dowlais than Pentrebach. I can't remember ...oh yes, I can remember. Yes, we'd have about 20 minutes in the morning and the afternoon and about an hour dinner time. There was a canteen there. I couldn't for a minute remember Pentrebach but I do now , and I remember more about Dowlais because I worked there a longer time and the factory girls and office girls all the same canteen.

Did you have the same breaks?

Yes, we were there the same time as them.

They didn't have more breaks than you? I thought you said something about that?

That was my friend telling me yesterday that in Pentrebach the 15 year olds who started there had extra breaks which I never- didn't even know anything about until yesterday.

(15.50) Oh I see, just the 15 year olds?

Just the 15 year olds when they first started from school. That's what she was saying yesterday, they had extra breaks and my friend Marilyn and I worked in the same office ' Well we never had them' and Marilyn said ' Well I started there straight from school 'I said 'Well I didn't, I went to work (unclear) Marilyn went to the computer school first, she ...um...did it privately before she went up there. But more or less it was straight from school but we never had extra breaks or any little tokens to have any food either. She said yesterday that's what they had.

Was Marilyn your friend who was down in the course in Cardiff with you?

No that was Charlotte. Marilyn and I worked together - she lives opposite by here. We worked in the office for all the time that we were there together. Got married about the same time and things like that you know.

Did you know her before you went there?

No I knew her husband he was in school with me. Our children are big friends.

When you were in the polish factory how much did you earn?

£ 1.50.

£1.50 a week?

Yes, and I think it was just over £3 when I went to Kayser Bondor, so it was double the money.

(17.23) When you started?

Yes.

When you were a trainee?

Yes.

When you did this course, did your wages go up?

No.

So you were on that wage?

The same wage. It went up with age.

What year are we talking about here now?

1956 I went to the (unclear ?) school, and I stayed there until I went to London in 1962.

So was that £3.3s then.....was that?

I had more money when I was a supervisor then, I think it went up. Over the years then it went up, it was about £8.

When you started, that £3 3s, did that seem a good wage at the time?

Not as good as Hoovers!

No, but you know...

It wasn't a bad wage, yes, but everybody tried to get into Hoovers because they had (unclear) and a lot of extra money in there. But I never managed to get a job there!

You were still living at home now when you were earning this money?

Yes.

What did you do with the money, how did you?

Until I was 18 my mother took all the money and gave me pocket money, then when I was 18, she said 'It's board and lodge now'. I can't remember how much board and lodge I gave her! She had 4 daughters and one son, and when they were 18, 'Right, you're on your own now'. She'd

give me board and lodge and whatever you've got back is yours. I can't remember how much board and lodge was now.

What did you do with the money that was left over?

(19.04) We went to dances! Lots of dances.

Where were the dances?

Palace, Miners, Catholic Hall, Troed-y-Rhiw we used to have a dance. Aberfan cinema had a dance then but I can't remember what year they started. Four places, always dancing about 3 or 4 times a week, so we must have had enough money for that.

What kind of dancing was it?

Rock and Roll then.

In all those places?

Yes.

So you went to the cinema as well? Can you remember any of the films?

Bill Haley, Rock Around the Clock. No....not really. If I saw them I'd say I'd seen them, but no.

Do you think music was a big part of your life then?

Yes.

Did you used to buy records as well?

No, too poor to buy records. A lot of my friends had record players but I didn't.

Did they play music in the factory?

I think they did, I think there was background music, but I can't really remember. It was so noisy, the factory, you know, machines going. They might have but I can't remember.

They didn't play music in the office then?

No.

(20.45) You had to concentrate?

Concentrate on what you were doing. Couldn't afford to make mistakes then!

Did anybody used to make mistakes?

Not that I knew of.

It was pretty efficient was it?

You had cross-sectioners to check and everything like that; they were a pretty efficient lot. They all thought a lot of their jobs (?)

Tell me what exactly did the factory make?

Underwear.

Did you have to look after that side of it as well? Was it only wages, or did you have to do accounts for

I left Kayser Bondor to go to London, when I came back after 6 months I couldn't get a job back in Kayser Bondor so I went to AB Metals for a few months but it was such a long way to travel down to Abercynon, that I got back into Kayser Bondor, then I worked in the accounts then until I had my baby which was about 2 years later.

So what was that like compared to wages?

(21.56) We didn't do anything for two weeks, and then the other two weeks you were flat out! So it was veryum

So was that depending on the time of the month kind of thing?

Yes, you did your months accounts but for two weeks you didn't do hardly.....Wages, you're every week flat out, but in accounts for two weeks you don't do hardly anything and then the other two weeks then you're doing double the work you know. I preferred wages to accounts.

Did you? Why was that do you think?

I don't know- I loved working in wages.

Was it that kind of personal thing as well I suppose?

No it was just very.....I don't knoweven when I left, when I went to work in Leicester it was always in wages I went because I just liked that type of work. I don't know why but it was more interesting. I found it more interesting than accounts. I found accounts very dull.

How did people's wages....did they differ a lot or were they paid basically....

They were paid for how hard they worked.

So did it differ a lot?

Yes, quite a bit. There was a lot of them who were very very good at their jobs - one woman in... folding (?) (unclear ?) I think she was working and boy did she earn some money because she was fast. The faster you were - fast and accurate. You know it was no good being fast and then

you haven't folded them properly. I did find that the people who cleaned the garments, an auntie of mine cleaned them, and the stuff they were using was very very strong for spots if there was any spots. And my auntie went blind after, and I don't know whether it was from that or not, I don't know. But she did go blind. But I did know personally, there was a pub up there and she bought the pub after, and oh she was fast. She earned hell of a lot of money she did.

Did they earn more than money you did?

Oh yes.

Did they all earn more money than you did, or just the really good ones?

Most of them I think did earn more money than us. You know we were office workers, but we weren't on that good a wage. But some of the factory workers were really flat out.

(24.16) Do you think they were happy with that kind of piece work system?

Yes, I think so, because they knew that the more they worked the better wages they earned. There were two factories up there actually. One was the underwear factory which I worked in, and the stocking factory was the other side. The stocking factory had always been up there so when ...I don't know why they moved from PentrebachBut we all moved up into the other half of the factory and amalgamated then. So whether ...like we had the other day when things went a bit down I don't know, but I enjoyed working in Kayser Bondor.

So how many women worked there, say compared to men?

Not many men - not in the underwear anyway. I never went into the stocking factory, so I don't know how many worked there, and it was only the mechanics, office workers, store men. So what, twelve mechanics, store men, say twenty to thirty men. They were in very short supply of men....and office management then.

What about cutters, were they men or women?

The bosses were men the girls were cutters, um....the cutters were girls.

So how then-because you had all the inside information for this- how did their wages compare? How did the women's and the men's wages compare?

Oh the men had more wages than the women.

(26.00) Did they? Even though the women really were doing the...

Oh yes, there was a big difference in the men's wages.

How did people feel about that?

I don't think it ever bothered them at that time. They weren't doing the same job.

No, but you could argue that maybe they were doing a more important job, the women. They were actually making the stuff.

Yes, but I don't think there was any at that time, there was no women's lib or anything at that time.

No, but did it change over the years?

After I left, after I stopped working it changed. But I wasn't working there then. Because I mean, some of the office workers were doing the same jobs as us, but they had more men. But that was just accepted then, people didn't argue about it or anything like that. 'Right I'm doing the same job as you', which they did another 10 years after that. And they did start saying about isn't it, like that 'Made in Dagenham' film.

And there was a dispute in Hoover of course wasn't there, after the Equality Act came in, yes? I was just wondering how it, you know...

There never seemed to be any, I can't remember anything. No. But I can't remember anybody saying 'Well, we're doing the same....' but on the factory floor nobody was doing the same work. The mechanics, they were doing their own job, there were store men, and machinists. I don't remember any boys doing any machine work.

(27.38) So you say you earned more money....when did you become a supervisor?

When I was 20 I think it was. Either 20 or 21. 1960 time.

How did your job change when you became a supervisor?

Well, I was in charge of 8 girls and I had to make sure the wages were all done. In charge of all the money. Make sure everything balanced. Getting the money from the bank, and making sure that there was no money missing, make sure everybody's tax was paid, and if somebody'd come in with a complaint about the tax, you had to handle all that. A lot of, I can't think of the word....a lot of work on your shoulders....

Responsibility?

That's the word I was looking for. But I liked it, I really thrived on that. I liked anything to do with that you know.

Did you have to do the calculations as well?

Yes, but you still had to make sure that each girl had so many wages to do. Some of ours were a bit slower than the other, so you always had to help out the ones who were a bit slower, and make sure that their ...everything was done properly, everything balanced, that the whole lot of

them came together and balanced. You ordered the money, and of course it wasn't paid by cheque then. It was all wage packets, so we had to have so many fifty pence's, so many ten pence's; it wasn't ten pence's then, that's before decimalisation wasn't it? But I suppose it would be easier now with everyone paid straight into the bank isn't it, but you had to make sure when the money went to the bank.

(29.52) You had to make sure you had so many £5 notes, so many £1 notes, so many 50 pences, and you had to work that out from, you know all the money that you took. Because at the end of the day, when you made their wages up on a Friday, you couldn't run out of £5 notes 'cos nobody could go to the bank and getwe didn't keep any money on the premises , only petty cash. You had to make sure everything was right there, 'cos if they didn't have the right amount in their pay packet, you couldn't ask them for change, you had to have it exact as it went in. Friday morning then we did all the wages up.

This was weekly was it?

Weekly

Were you all paid weekly, or were some people paid monthly?

I don't know if the management were paid monthly, I don't know, but we were all paid weekly. We didn't do management's wages. I don't know who did them I never saw that!

(30.51) Did this involve training people as well?

Yes. I mean obviously they were qualified comptometer operators when they came there, but they had to train them up to do the wages and everything like that , and we worked on Kalamazoo system then was it ? The wage system was Kalamazoo I think it was called. Now they've got Sage and I don't know what they've got all together now. At that time it was just....

It must have been really hard work without the aid of...

We worked 39 hours a week then , it wasn't part time like everybody else seems to be working these days, and we went out of the house at quarter to eight in the morning, the bus went at 10 to eight, and it took an hour to get to work. So, because we had to change buses in Merthyr. The factory workers would get free buses in the morning, and get taken straight to work. I think they only out the free buses on after they moved down to Dowlais. I don't think they had free buses before that. There was such a....nobody wanted to move to Dowlais, and Pentrebach factory was right opposite the Hoover factory now. Do you know Pentrebach at all?

Yes.

Where all the new shops and factories are, Kayser Bondor was opposite their playing fields there. It was a pretty new factory so they didn't really want to transfer to an old factory, so there was....

Oh I see, so the Dowlais factory was older was it?

Yes, and the one in Pentrebach was pretty new, so it was ...we had very pleasant working in the office. You know, we were overlooking the road, it was really nice offices there, and to go up to Dowlais wasn't very nice.

Do you know why that happened then?

No I don't know. Probably they had a credit crunch same as we had so they (unclear). We didn't have any choice, if you didn't move you didn't have a job, sowe didn't like it though... they took a long time to get used to working up there.

(33.11) Tell me about the facilities first of all then in Pentrebach, what was the canteen like?

Very pleasant. Yes, a nice canteen on the ground floor. I couldn't remember it at first, but I do now. It was right on the end, a nice canteen.

Did everybody used to eat together?

Yes.

Management as well?

Yes. Not the top man.

Right I see.

No I don't think the boss of our office ate there either. No I don't think he did eat the same time as us, I think they had a staff canteen.

What about heating and lighting and stuff like that was it good?

Lighting was alright, I can't remember the heating to be honest. This is the days before central heating this is isn't it?

It must have been alright otherwise you would have remembered being really cold.

No I think it was alright.

What about other facilities, did you have rest rooms, what were the toilets like.

Just toilets and they were ok.

So were things worse then, in Dowlais do you think? Canteen not so good?

It was upstairs the canteen was and ...friendlier. The canteen staff.

That's odd isn't it?

But then a few of them were from Pentrebach so....I don't know. Not as nice a canteen, perhaps other people have got a different opinion, I don't know, only bits you remember now.

What did people like about Pentrebach was it just the building or was the location better do you think?

What I thought, for me, the location was better. It was closer to home and the offices were lovely and pleasant, windows all the way along. You overlooked the road, you could see the traffic passing and when we moved to Dowlais we were crowded into a room that had about 2 windows and it wasn'tunless you had a desk, which you eventually worked up to, right next to the window, it could be quite dark there, not as pleasant as Pentrebach.

(35.42) Did the factory workers feel the same, did they have the same issues do you think?

I don't know.

Were there any unions in the factory?

I didn't belong to a union but I don't know if there was one. I would think there was.

So you weren't aware....was there an office union?

There wasn't an office union. We didn't have one.

Did you have any disputes, that kind of thing, in the office?

No I don't think so I can't remember any.

Do you think everybody was quite happy on the whole?

Most of them wanted to go to Hoovers to work because of the money, but most of them were happy there I think.

Would you say money was the only issue then?

Yes, I would think so.

Do you think you were quite well treated by the management and bosses there?

Yes.

Do you think, I know it's hard for you to talk about other people, but do you think that the factory floor staff felt the same?

Yes, I was friendly with a few girls, we all went out together dancing, and one of my best friends worked on the factory floor, and another worked in the kitting?(unclear) room, so yes, I think they were all alright. Pretty happy in their work.

You think it was a content workforce except that you could have got more money in Hoovers?

More money would have been nice.

Did you feel everybody was fairly treated then?

Yes.

Did you have to wear a special uniform?

We did have overalls the last two years we were there, we had overalls.

Tell me about them.

A bit of a bone of contention, nobody wanted them but we got used to them after that.

Why do you think you had to wear overalls?

I don't know who brought that in. I can't remember, but it was easier than looking for clothes to wear every day. Lilac overalls. A nice colour lilac.

(38.00) But it was only the last year or two that was.

Was it the same colour as the factory workers?

No.

What did they wear?

I can't remember.

But it was different?

Yes.

Ok. So did you have to pay for that uniform or was it given to you by Kayser Bondor?

No I think we had to pay for them I think. I think we did, but that's another thing I can't remember.

Ok. Can you remember were people allowed to talk while they worked on the floor?

Yes.

What about going to the toilet and things? Were they allowed to?

I don't know about that.

What about smoking? Were people allowed to?

They couldn't smoke in the factory.

Where did people smoke then?

Outside I think. Probably in the canteen. Smoking had only just come in the last few years then hadn't it? Six, seven years wasn't it? But you wouldn't have been allowed to smoke in the factory because there too many hazardous materials and things.

How was the relationship- you say there weren't many men there - how was the relationship between the men and the women?

Good! There weren't many men there so they had hundreds of girls after them!

Was there any harassment going on? Either way?

No.

What about the women harassing the men?

No, I never saw any of that.

(39.40)In fact, a lot of the mechanics did marry girls from the factory floor. Most of them did find romance on the floor!

So did you get married while you still worked at Kayser Bondor?

Yes. Then I went back after.

Did you keep in working after you were married?

Until I was pregnant. I worked up until 6 months and then I left then.

Was your husband happy about that?

Yes.

He didn't mind you working, because some husbands don't?

No (unclear) He didn't want me working after the baby was born, but then I didn't have anyone to look after her anyway until I went to live in Leicester. I did work then for about 18 months. No, two years, I worked up in Leicester, mainly to be able to afford a house.

Did you stay at home until you got married?

Yes.

With your parents?

Yes.

Where did you live after you married then?

Down the street here. My husband was from this street and...

From Troedyrhiw?

He was born here and we bought a house in the same street.

Right. I was going to ask you about holidays. First of all, how many days a week did you work?

Five.

Did you ever work on weekends?

When they were stock taking.

Oh did you? Right, was that justtell me about that then.

How often did they do stock taking now? I don't know if it was once every 6 months, but everybody had to work on the Saturday then when they were stock taking.

All day?

Yes, (unclear ?) all day.

But not that often then?

As long as it took then. Not very often.

You didn't work overtime did you usually?

No.

Just for stock taking?

Yes.

(41.46) Did you have an annual holiday?

Yes, two weeks in summer.

Was that the miner's holiday?

Factory fortnight.

Yes, factory fortnight. That was with pay was it?

Yes.

What about bank holidays?

Easter, Whitsun and Christmas. That was including part of your holidays. You had to work a year before you were entitled to any holidays.

Including bank holidays?

Yes, that was part of it.

So, what would happen then? Because presumably the factory would shut on a bank holiday would it?

Yes.

You just wouldn't be paid would you?

You wouldn't get paid until you were entitled to it.

And you wouldn't be paid for the summer?

No.

Where did you go on holiday?

When I was 15.... but I wasn't working then....when I was 16 I went to Blackpool, when I was 17 I went to Blackpool. When I was 18 I went to Majorca. When I was 19 I went to Italy, when I was 20 I went to Italy. We saved all year round for that. WE were about the first ones ever to go abroad.

Right.

(42.58) And then 21 was when I went to work in London so I didn't have many holidays after that!

Did you arrange for yourself to go to Blackpool? I mean was it with a crowd of friends?

About 4 or 5 friends.

From work?

No, not from work.

From Aberfan?

Yes. Childhood friends for Blackpool, and then when we went to Majorca it was all from work. A gang of us decided to go to Majorca, the following year we went to Italy, a gang from work, and then two of us went to Italy again the following year.

So, why Italy? Why Majorca, as well?

I don't know- it was abroad wasn't it? It was exciting! We were single and it was nice.

Where did you go in Italy?

(Unclear) on the Adriatic.

And how many times did you go there?

Twice.

Have you been back there since?

I've been back to Italy since but not to R(unclear?)

Did you enjoy it?

Yes! We saved all year round for it, really saved. The first year in Majorca it was £45 for a fortnight.

Which was a lot of money then!

A lot of money then. Very often we couldn't go out to dancing or anything like that we'd have to save or money so we'd go and stand outside the dance and watch them coming out! It was a lot of money then.

But that would be 5 or 6..... even when you were a supervisor that would be 5 or 6 weeks work.

I think I was earning £8 a week when I was a supervisor. I know when I went to live in Leicester I was earning £12, I was earning more money up in Leicester, but before then it was about £8 even when I was a supervisor. It wasn't a lot of money then. But as I said those holidays were saved for!

How did you go there?

Well, we flew first to Majorca, the next year we went by train and ferry, and the third time we flew.

Right. From Cardiff?

Gatwick.

Oh, from Gatwick.

I don't think Cardiff existed then. It was very small anyway.

(45.35) Yes it was very small. So did the factory used to arrange any do's, you know, Christmas? Can you tell me about that?

A lot of them were in the Miner's Hall in Merthyr, and then we did have one in Cardiff in the City Hall. I remember that one in the City Hall.

What was that then?

A dance.

A dinner and dance thing?

No dinner, just a dance.

So what kind of dance was it?

Normal dance, just a get together, you know.

Yes. What kind of music?

The music of that time, you know. Rock and Roll, you know whatever.

Oh was it, Rock and Roll?

Whatever.

In the City Hall? Wow!

It was nice.

Yes? And how many of you went there?

There was a special train, I remember going on a special train out on for it. That was about the only time we went to Cardiff. We would arrange office do's where we would go to the Capital in Cardiff. You'd have um, there was a couple of floors where you could have bars and things, but that was just office do's that was. The whole of the factory would go for the Christmas dance. Mainly in the Miner's Hall in Merthyr. There was always fighting broke out at the end. Always.

Right. What about the Capital, did you ever go and see any of the bands in the Capital.

No, not at that time. We'd arrange trips to umwe saw Cliff Richard in Cardiff. We had a trip from the factory. Tommy Steele, you know just somebody would run a trip and you'd go off on a bus to Cardiff.

You didn't go and see the Beatles?

No that was before our time. We were married by the time the Beatles.

1964 wasn't it?

Yes. I got married in 1964!

*Is there any one event you remember in particular you remember from your time in the factory?
A visit from anybody, or that kind of thing?*

(47.46) No. I can remember Princess Margaret opening Hoovers, but that was when I was young. The crowds that were standing up by Pentrebach waiting for her. I remember seeing that. I must have been about 9 or 10 or something like that. But she passed in the car before I saw her, but I don't remember any when I was there. We did go, a few of us went with.... Kayser Bondor had a few factories, one was in Biggleswade one was in Brighton, and if they were short of (unclear) especially in the holiday time if anyone was off with sick, they'dtwo girls would go from Dowlais to work up there. They'd pay for a hotel and they'd work in the factory up there for two or three weeks. And they'd pay your fare up, you'd stay in a hotel. Brighton I went, I went twice, and you'd have all your meals there and everything like that. They'd take you to work. You'd do a normal days work in the factory and come home in the night, but we all thought that was.....to get on that was alright (?unclear). I went twice.

And you enjoyed that?

Oh yes, (unclear) that was!

Did you go with someone?

Two of us.

Did they always send two?

Yes.

Oh yes, that would have been good then!

Yes. When I went to work in London, I worked for Beecham's Laboratory, they had a factory in Worthing, and they used to send me down there as well. So I used to go down to Worthing as well. Same thing. I stayed in the Grand Hotel in Worthing, and that was...but I was on my own then.

Did you enjoy that?

Yes.

Even though you were on your own?

Yes. They were very friendly in Worthing. London, I didn't like London. (unclear) worker in London. I like London to visit to go to shows, but I'd never work there again. They are not like us!

(49.44) No. So you left to have your daughter?

My daughter, yes.

Did you go back and work in the factory after that?

When I lived in Leicester. Not here. But we lived in Leicester for 5 years.

What kind of factory was that?

A knitwear factory.

What, sorry?

Knitwear.

Was that a big factory then?

Yes, quite a big factory, yes.

Were you doing wages then again?

Doing wages, yes.

(50.22) Tell me, did you enjoy working in...?

I always enjoyed working. I didn't want to leave work. Baby or anything like that. And it was....I'd always worked and staying at home wasn't easy. You know, my job was from 15 years of age I'd always earned my own money and to have a baby then and nobody to look after her. I didn't want to watch a baby I wanted to go to work! So it was very hard.

Yes.

But you get used to it after a while.

So how long was the gap before you went back then?

She was about 9 months old I think.

Oh she was quite young when you went back.

We moved to Leicester when she was 4 months old. Hoovers made a lot of people redundant at the time. My husband took redundancy and we moved to Coventry and then on to Leicester.

Right. What did he do up there then?

He was a toolmaker. He'd served his apprenticeship in Hoovers, and he went to work in one of the car factories. A lot of the engineering factories up there which was a lot more money. So we lived up there for 5 years.

It was a different world wasn't it?

Coventry wasn't very nice, a city of strangers, and I was with a baby and I just didn't know anyone. Then when we moved out to Leicester I still didn't know anyone but Leicester people are very much like us, and there was a creche up the road and I put the baby, she was 18 months old then.

There was a creche there! That was very cutting edge wasn't it at the time?

Well, it wasn't a creche it was a woman who looked after a lot of children.

Right, ok.

Not like they are now. I went back to work then until I had my next child, then I didn't go to work after that.

So when the children grew up, did you go back then?

I went to work in Leos and the Co-op in Pentrebach.

Right. About three years, then but my husband, and I have kept pubs.

Oh I see.

You know, we kept a pub in Troed-y-rhiw for a few years and then I retired last year We would the pub. We'd bought our own pub about 12 years ago, we gutted it and did it up. Opened it about 9 years ago, and just over 3 years ago my husband died of cancer.

Oh I'm sorry.

So my daughter and I ran it for 18 months, then we leased it out for a year, and then they said they'd but it after a year, which they did. So, I've retired now.

Your experience of doing wages must've....

Now they've roped me in to be the Treasurer of the old age pensioners.

Oh there we are!

(53.19) I thought I'd finished with all that but because I've dealt in money, I'm still working!

People who've dealt in money are always valuable you see!

I didn't even want to go there. I didn't want to admit that I was old enough to be in the old age, and now I'm the Treasurer, so...

There we are. So tell me then, you enjoyed working in factories, yes.

Yes.

Are you in contact with any of your former workmates now?

Yes, I was talking to one yesterday.

Do you see them quite often? Do you go out with them and things?

No, no if we meet, we can't stop talking, and it's as if we've seen each other. At the moment it's if somebody rings me up to say somebody's died that we worked with, you know. But then we'll go on the hone for about an hour or more and we don't stop talking. It's such an easy relationship, or it was a really easy relationship that it's easy to slip back into it, you know.

How would you assess that period of your life?

Good. I enjoyed it. I didn't enjoy the polish factory, the smell was terrible, and it was dark and dingy. But I did enjoy Kayser Bondor, and in Leicester I enjoyed. I've never been in contact with those girls up there since though, that's funny. The other day I was thinking about them, and I thought I wonder where they are now. But we lost contact then when we came back here to live, your family's growing up and grandchildren now, and time goes!

Yes, but when you came back here you could pick up with the girls from Kayser Bondor?

Some of them, yes. I've been friends with them all along, and one, a couple of them factory girls. One died two years ago, but the other one I see her, not on, you know, every day, but if we see each other now we don't stop talking. So that was factory girls as well as office girls you know. There was a good interaction between us. I found anyway. Most of the girls in the office as well, they got on well with the girls in the factory. So, I don't know if I've been any help to you?

Yes, you have. Thank you very much.

55:47

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD Y CYFWELIAD