

## LLEISIAU O LAWYR FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

### Mettoys, Fforestfach, Swansea

**Interviewee:** VSW033 Margaret Hayes

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**Interviewer:** Jaci Gruffudd on behalf of Women's Archive Wales

Margaret is 91 years old and was born near the Palace cinema, High Street but moved to St Thomas aged 3. Her father drove an engine in the Hafod Copperworks –he called it the “Rose” and was very proud of it. She had 2 brothers, one an electrician and the other an accountant.

She went to St Thomas school and left at the age of 14. Her first job was in a photography shop in the Strand had to get up at 6.30 to get there. All her friends had jobs –Tinworks, Weavers, Elba –plenty of jobs then. Left to work in the Empire cinema – job more exciting her mother and her sisters were also usherettes there.

Called up for the war aged 18. After the war she married and had a baby within a year. Started in Mettoys when the youngest of 5 children was 8. Chose Mettoys because many friends worked there.

The toys never wore out as they were cast iron -marvellous toys. No qualifications needed for the job –worked in warehouse on a fixed wage rate. Worked evenings 4.30 to 9.30 or as children were older started day shift at 10. Had mother living with them so 8 people to cook and clean for.

No restrictions in the warehouse could go to toilet when want to, could talk and sing but no music played. Didn't like it in the factory because of the pressure of piece rate.

Workers were allowed to buy a big bag of toys for only £5. Rejects were sent to Cefn Coed for patients to dismantle. Three factories located in the Fforestfach Industrial Estate.

Sometimes searched for thefts even a full body search but not much pilfering as could buy them cheaply.

Girls came from a long way away – Pontarddlais, Skewen. Had a free bus to work as the Company was glad of the workers.

Good conditions food inexpensive in canteen and nice toilets.

No training offered to her. Other family members worked in Mettoys daughter in sales office, son in law worked on computers.

Mostly married women worked there considered more reliable.

Wages £7 a wk for 7a.m. to 4 p.m.shift. Part time 4.30 to 9.30 £4.10 a wk. Paid every week in cash no pay rise in 12 years.

Wages needed to help the family 2 children went to university.

Husband was a welder in Rees and Kirkby.

Girls from Pontarddlais could speak Welsh **“but always spoke English ..wouldn’t do for them to do that (speak Welsh) they would be clouted if they did that.”**

There was a union TGWU – no strike when she was there. **“Mr Katz a nice boss though we never saw him. He was a Jew- .provided work for 3,0000 men and women a big thing then.”**

Had to wear overalls which we bought ourselves some came in turbans –nice respectable women.

There were plenty of rats in the warehouse because of the cardboard. Also worked in a warehouse near the South Dock rats there came out of the water. Men would catch them and kill them.

The only rule in the warehouse was no smoking and had to follow a fire drill.

No health and safety training –windows were painted in the summer to keep out the sun as it got too hot.

Men treated the women well.

Her husband happy for her to go to work as need the money.

Only 2 weeks holiday a year which was stop fortnight the last week in July. Didn’t go away went to beach and park.

Only social life was a Christmas meal in town.

Margaret walked to and from Fforestfach –in winter girls let out early if weather was bad. Some walked to the Hafod –pavements could be very slippery **“ It wasn’t all honey”**

No tea break only lunch break took sandwiches as couldn't afford to eat in the canteen though the food was good.

You could have time off for funerals etc but lost pay.

Mettoys valued good workers “ **you were appreciated**”

Left when husband died young aged 50. Was told by Social Security to look for a job as only had £19 a week in benefits.

Got a job in a medical packing factory which was nearer home so could go home lunch time to see to elderly mother. Ann had a small interview for the shop floor job but not the office job as her mother had got that for her.

She could sit down to do the work but most of the work for everyone was sitting down. She could walk a bit then not like now as she is in a wheelchair. She couldn't do any heavy lifting. All the jobs were suitable for her ability to do.

A working day started at 7.30 a.m. with a break at 10 a.m. a cigarette break –we used to go into the toilet. Lunch at 12.30 for 3 quarter of an hour and finish at 4.30 p.m.

5 days a week they were long days. Her mother had worked there for years and did evening shifts when she was small as her father could look after her.

Would catch bus into work with her mother if her father needed the car when on a night shift. She felt her mother was too protective of her when girls used to tell raucous jokes.

The men who worked with her were craftsmen, machine fitters or in the stores. No training or qualifications were offered . It was piece work- if you finished your work you would help others It was very good everyone helped each other. Paid every week cash in a brown envelope- can't remember now how much but can remember the money going up at some time. Kept the wages for herself before being married and after it went into household budget. Married at 21 and pregnant 3 months after. Stayed with her parents for the first few years as saving up to buy the bungalow where they still live. It suits my needs.

Was a member of a Union but can't remember any strikes or Union involvement.

Had to provide own overalls.

No Health and Safety training but no accidents.

**“ when you think about it going back those days I would walk in and out of machines there were guards on the machines but red hot plastic came out of some machines They used to feed the hoppers with dry plastic and it used to come out boiling hot.”**

Toilets and cloakrooms were good -used to go for a smoke in them. The canteen was large but used to take own food and just buy a drink from the canteen.

Music was played in the canteen and factory floor.

**“ I can remember sitting there in the October time the music stopped and the news of the Aberfan disaster came. It was strange there was noise in the factory but it went really quiet after that. It something you don’t forget. Quite emotional that day.”**

Not allowed to smoke on the factory floor but could talk. The machines could not be stopped as the plastic would go hard so had to get a replacement worker if you left the machine to go to the toilet.

Worked 5 days a week and had a chance to work on a Saturday morning especially coming up to Christmas they would need you to do overtime. Only holiday could remember was going to Blackpool with Mam and Dad when 17years old. Had evenings out with factory girls and 21<sup>st</sup> party in Mettoys club

Made a good friend, Grace Beaman in Mettoys known each other for 40 years.

Evenings out were dancing and entertainment no discos then.

Can’t remember any works parties in Mettoys but remembers going to one in Remploy with her uncle.

There were differences between office and factory workers she felt that they were cleverer than her.

Ann worked for 5 years in Mettoys and finished when she became pregnant. She didn’t go back to work afterwards as she felt it would be too much.

Her mother was in service in Gwydr Terrace, Uplands, Swansea as a young girl – she walked there and back to Grrreenhill every day . Money better in Mettoys and not appreciated when in service treated lower than factory workers.

Father worked in Felindre in the acid plant on shift work –not a very good job affected him in the end –died from lung cancer.

Brother also worked in Felindre in a better job on the rolling press. That’s what happened in those days- families worked together.

In Mettoys lots of family members worked there –sisters and daughters.

Supportive to people with disabilities –young girl, Vera ,had Downs syndrome she was given lighter work which she could do. Very good like that.

Happy period of my life **“You can never be shy after working in a factory full of women”**  
Husband, an apprentice engineer hated going to Spontex factory as the women would tease him to pieces – they felt they had the upper hand on men.

Also happened at Mettoys as well as one or two affairs.