

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Addis, 1963-1971; Mettoys c. 1974-6

Interviewee: VSW043 Margaret Rose Morris

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Interviewer: Silva Huws on behalf of Women's Archive Wales

Well I'm from Llangyfelach Road by there in Gorsyllan and my parents and grandparents grew up there. And we've always lived there it was only a little village then when we grew up. Now you've got all these estates going around it, but then there was nothing there. We used to go to the chapel and the school were nearby in the same road. Not far to go shops just down the road we done our shop round here. My mother wasn't working but she had me, but my grandparents, he was in the colliery and in the wash she used to work in the management in ammunition and things like that, my grandmother used to. Before that she worked on a farm over by the "Welcome" by that way, and there used to be a farm where the Mynydd Bach School is.

What did your dad do?

Don't know. No idea. My step father, you know, he looked after me, but then they moved away. I stayed here. They moved away then, and then she had six after me.

So you stayed with your grandmother?

Yes.

Where did you go to school?

School was Tirdeunaw just up the road. And then I went to Mynydd Bach then. Cause you were on the borderline, the end of the road was a borderline, all my friends lived up here went down to Morryston. Well I had to go [laughs] only a couple of us was borderline and they went to Penlan Boys School and I went to Mynydd Bach.

So you didn't know anybody else in your class?

Not many I knew up there. I made friends when I got there.

So how old were you when you left school?

Fifteen. I started about July then at Addis.

Did you decide to leave school?

Everyone left at fifteen. Get out there and work. [laughs]

How did you feel about leaving school?

I'd far rather go to work than school. [laughs] I didn't like school.

I went to Addis first. I went there when I was fifteen. I finished when Paul was born. '71 Paul was born. I finished then.

How did you get your job in Addis?

Just filled the form in, and they sent for me then. I went up to my mother's on holiday for a fortnight and then I come back and I started work.

What was your first job there?

Making pegs. Plastic pegs. They would make a big cut in your hand because when you put them in the machinery the plastic on the ends used to stick out on you so you had to bang them in the machine. Give yourself a big bang, so then I come home with these big blisters, so he said "pack it in we'll find you another job."

That's what your grandfather said?

Yes, so I went in I give my notice in. I said to them I wanted to finish so they sent me up the office to see the manager and he said "do you like it here?" and I said yes. So I showed him my hand, and he said "you're no good on that job will you stay on and go somewhere else?" I said yes. So I went into the mill to work then. You're cutting the wood and there's a nail and there used to be little bits on the end you had to sandpaper them off until smooth before they go on to the dipping department. So I went over there then.

So this was where they coated them?

Yes, that was my main job then. I was putting the coating on. Coats on everything you know. But they had to be smooth before they come to us. In this department you could spray them, you could dip them and another department called the bristle come over. You have a pad and all the bristles would be on the pad in our shop, then you had to put a coating over that of Bostick, two coatings of that before it goes back and be put on together.

Were you doing this by hand or using machines?

Machines you had for things for the trays to go under to dip them and put varnish on them. But the Bostick if you opened a new tin of that you'd be high as a kite.

With solvents?

Oh yes the fumes were terrible.

So you didn't have any protection from the fumes?

Oh no you'd be as high as a kite. [laughs] It was all right when you got near the end, there was nothing there then. Weren't too bad. But dipping was my job. Well, you had to put them on the trays for them to go in for dipping to go for so many coats.

On a conveyor belt or by hand?

You had a slab and you put these trays on, and you would knock them on, then they go into the first coat second coat and third coat.

You weren't lifting these big trays?

They were about that big [shows about 2 feet] you had to lift them up.

Was that heavy work then?

Yes it was heavy work especially if you had three or four. You know carrying. Especially the iron. The wood ones were all right, [laughs] but then if you run out of work you had to go upstairs. And you know the eyelash brushes? I used to make those. Till the work come back downstairs. If not you'd have to go to another department, you could be sent anywhere.

Depending on what jobs the orders were for?

Yes. A nice place and nice to work with you know. The girls. We were friends for years we used to go out together in the nights and the weekends. Dancing and a drink, it was nice. There were days, and you had to work overtime. It was in your job, say if you had a rush order, you have to work two nights and Saturdays to get those orders out.

You didn't have any choice about working overtime?

Well some would. I didn't mind. Didn't have to go home too early.

Did you know anyone else working in the factory before you went there?

No. All new people

You didn't need any qualifications to get that job?

No, not that job. Good thing we didn't. [laughs]

Any tests or training while you were there?

No, not that job. They trained you up as you went along, you had to learn this and that. Showed you what to do.

Did you like the work as well as [liking] the nice people?

I enjoyed the work, nice people. The foreman was good. He'd help you out if anything happened, you know. If someone was taken ill he'd go and do their jobs, see to them, call the nurse and take their job off them you know. He was good like that. And we got on all right, the people there you know. There was no arguments or anything like that, and most of the girls we used to go out on the weekend together. Wherever there was a dance hall going. Mumbles. Skewen. We'd go anywhere. As long as there was a dance, we'd go anywhere. The twist, the jive. Whatever was going, just ordinary dancing.

Do you remember any of the bands?

No, don't remember those, after a couple of drinks you don't remember those, do you? [Laughs] Just the dancing and getting a bus home.

Any perks from working in Addis? Any extras?

You could buy stuff cheap in the shop there. You'd put your order in, and she'd make it up by Friday when you'd get your pay. One good thing you could go home with clothes brushes, hair brushes, if you was having a baby you could have a baby's bath, you could have everything you know. Whatever you wanted sort of thing. As long as your order was in by a certain date.

How many other women were working in the factory?

Couldn't tell you. They made Christmas trees as well, a big part for Christmas trees. It was a big place. We were outside the big place, because we were the paint job we had to be outside. For safety. It was a building outside the building. The main building you had the sawmill, you had everything there, then the part where the bristles was, then another department and right at the top they used to do the Christmas trees. But we were outside for safety sake there. And then we had another building next to us you know the pumice stones, they were putting the pummy stones on. Next to us that was an outside building. Then there was the canteen and everything there. And the canteen was up there and you had the tools. All the tools whatever you wanted, you could go and get the tools there.

You had a canteen?

Yes you had the canteen. It was alright. Dinners up there whatever you wanted.

You had to buy your own dinner?

Oh yes. The prices were all right. I didn't have much of them. I'm a very fussy eater. I don't eat gravy nor butter, nothing like that. Perhaps they'd have a bowl of soup. I wouldn't because I don't like soup. A lot of the girls would go up there for a cup of tea and a chat, it was always full. Two breaks for us; first break and second break you see.

So you all took the same time break?

No, we had to do split shifts. Whoever went on the first shift, we had to cover their jobs, as well to make sure there was keep flowing all the stuff. They'd do the same then to cover their own job and ours.

What about toilet breaks?

You could go when you want to.

What about smoking breaks?

Oh no, not smoking. In the toilets. [laughs] You'd go in there.

You smoked when you went to the toilet?

Yes, the man from the mill Stan used to live down the road from me, and if you were more than 10 minutes in that toilet he used to come and whistle. He'd just go in and

he'd whistle, and they'd know they had to come out. He would time you, you couldn't take more than 10 minutes to have your cigarette and go to the toilet.

Did they encourage you to get trained up any more to a higher level?

Not really no. You had a lot came in as management, and that was it.

So there was no way of moving up?

I suppose you could if you wanted to.

Do you remember how much you were paid in a week?

Say £5?

What year would this have been?

When I was fifteen. By the time you paid tax you would come home with about £4. £4.90 something like that you know. That was a full week it would be a bit more if you worked overtime. That wasn't until later on when you got into your job.

What time would you go in in the morning?

I think it was about 8. Half past seven bus up here, got the bus down, finished about half past four. The bus used to come half past four. Five day week. Saturday morning and two nights overtime. If you had overtime you had to walk all the way up to get a bus down Gwrysydd and all the way up. Unless you wait for another bus. Then for overtime you worked till half past six.

You didn't work nights at all?

No, once it had finished in the day that was it. No shift work there. You got extra for overtime.

How were you paid?

At the top of Fforestfach there used to be Midland Bank. We used to have our wages first, then they put the Midland Bank there, and we used to have to go up and get stuff get your money from the Midland Bank. So Friday was hectic to get up there, and get your money. You'd run up the road just to get to the end of the queue [laughs] at the bank.

They gave you a chit did they?

Yes, they gave us cash then, they came round with the wage slip. It was easy that way, they came round, he'd do every one of us then.

The foreman would hand you it?

He'd come in. He'd hand it to the foreman, the foreman would hand it out to us then.

Did you know how much the other people got paid?

We were all more or less the same. More or less the same jobs.

What did you spend your money on?

Didn't have any to spend. Dancing. If you had money to go out Saturday night to have a drink and a dance you were quite happy with that.

So you had to share your wages with your family?

I had to give them all my wages, and she would give me so much back. Money for bus fare, and keep money then for going out Saturday night. It was only Saturday night you could afford to go out.

Did you have any holidays?

Two weeks.

You got paid for those two weeks?

Can't remember don't know. Never took any notice of that.

And the bank holidays as well?

I expect so.

Did you go away anywhere?

I'd go up to my mother's then for the fortnight.

Did you have to clock in and clock out?

Oh yes you'd clock in. And then when you came back for dinner you'd clock in again and then clock out. That's if you remembered that is. [laughs] I'd been in three days and forgot to clock in the three days. She come down from the office and said "You been in work?" I said yes. "Well you haven't clocked in." She give me a row for that and she was all right then.

Did they give you anything to wear any uniform?

No.

You just wore your own clothes?

Yes.

Do you remember anyone having any accidents or injuries at work?

No not really, no. Only that with my thumb, that was the only injury no big injuries.

Did they talk to you about health and safety at all?

Well I dunno. I remember being on the fire fighting thing, but I was on the outside I was always the last to get there. I had to go through the main building and up the main office. They wouldn't let you run round the corner to get to it.

The fire drill?

Oh yes.

So you remember doing the fire drill, but you don't remember any health and safety?

Wouldn't have taken any notice anyway most probably. [laughs] Enough to think about without that. There must have been some there, perhaps in the fire drill they told us about it.

Did they give you changing rooms or anything like that?

No just a peg to put your coats on. Everybody put their coats there, the whole factory used to be in there. Just remember where you put your coat, or you had to wait till everyone had gone to find yours.

So how did you feel in general then about Addis?

I enjoyed it there it were nice you know. Nice gang of girls to work with as well.

Why did you finish at Addis then?

When I had our Paul in '71.

When you had a baby?

I finished in '71. I think it was about August. I finished and he was born in September something like that. Three months before.

Were you working with the solvents then?

Yeah. He was alright. Didn't worry about that [laughs] he was alright.

Then you went to Mettoys later on. Why did you go there?

Well after I had had Paul, I was waiting to go into hospital for my gall bladder. My Gran then she had a stroke, so I was back and for every day and putting Paul into nursery. Mark was only a baby then, I had him in '73, and then a bit later on I applied for a job in Mettoys. Well, when I come in, you look at these screws and everything, and these bolts and think, what have I got to do with these. And if you didn't learn, she showed you what to do. Put your washers, bolts in certain sequence, take it all off and do it with the other hand. If you didn't do that within a certain time, you didn't get a job. Didn't worry about anything else. You had to do that one in a certain time or didn't get the job. Then you went for your interview after that.

So you had a test first to see if you were up for it and that interview after?

So did you pass that?

Yes. You had to do it with two hands. I'm very good with two hands. Well, you had to be. And I hated it there. Terrible. First job I had was all right. Making garages. Toy garages. There'd be four of us there. I used to be in half an hour before the rest so I'd load up everything, make sure we'd got everything, and all the right colours. Else they'd come back in different colours. Take all those, put them in the boxes, and go on to the new colours. I had to start assembling everything and gluing what I could, before the rest come in, to make sure the colour's off, and then we'd go on to the new colours then. And I enjoyed that. They moved me then on to the conveyor belt. For cars weren't it. Oh. [Sighs] There were pedals and you had to put your cars on, had to use two hands. You had to put wheels on like this all the time, [gestures] pressing it, then take it off and put it on the conveyor belt, and whoever was down the bottom then inspected them and put them on the trays ready to go out. But it all depends if you had your stuff. If they hadn't made the stuff you couldn't do your job. So you moved round then to different jobs what they had there. Then of course I went bad, then I finished in Mettoys, I couldn't do it any more.

You were ill were you?

Yeah. So then I went in for my gall bladder operation then. It had been on for years. But you've just got to wait your turn in hospital same as everything else. And I finished then in Mettoys.

What year was that then?

Don't know.

How old were the children?

I should imagine about three. But I was back and for here every day looking after my grandmother.

So you were in Mettoys about 2 years were you?

Roughly. It wasn't long. Then my sister got me a job then. 'You can start here,' she says to me. What am I doing? 'You're working in the kitchen,' she says to me. She was cleaning and I was in the kitchen. By the time I got into work she'd gone. In the Valbon, in town it used to be, and I worked there for a good couple of years.

She talks about working in kitchens and as a home help.

More on Mettoys

Did you know people working there before you went?

Yes one of my neighbours worked there as well.

We used to go in on the same shift. I knew one or two there. You couldn't talk there or anything mind you. Between the machinery going and you had to keep going. There was no stopping. The only time you stop is when you put your hand up, and there was two women that cover you for you to go to the toilet. And she'd carry on and she'd do your work while you went to the toilet and come back. And you only stopped for your break then. I was on the half past three. In from half past three until nine I think it was. Evening shift. Only a couple of hours, I didn't do night shift. God no.

You just had to keep going as fast as you could?

You just had to keep going, you couldn't stop. Nothing. A note would come down the line, or a sweet on the line you'd look up, you'd take the sweet. Put it in, you'd keep going.

So people put sweets down for each other?

Oh yeah, a sweet would go down the line, you'd think, 'oh I'll have that one now', just keep putting the cars back up. Get a note down the line, a big note "SMILE IF YOU HAD IT LAST NIGHT," and it would just go past you, you know. [laughs]

You couldn't talk but you sent messages to each other?

No. You couldn't talk. You'd have to learn to lip read you know, or shout. That's the only way you could do in Mettoys. Because you wouldn't hear anything for the noise of the machines going anyway. And you had to chase the woman too whoever was in charge. If she'd gone, you had to put your hand up, 'I've ran out of stuff.'

So there were women supervisors in Mettoys?

Oh yeah. She was a right one she was. If she didn't like you, you've had it.

Really?

Oh yeah.

So there was a bit of something going on? She liked to keep her friends in the job?

Oh yeah. Well, she was one of these; come in all dressed up long nails everything immaculate. And then when we were going out in the night she was meeting this other a man, and she was married with children. But he caught her in the end. They'd go to meet, they'd always be the last out. Never get in the queue first, always in the middle of the queue or last and they were waiting for me, see. "What's up here." [whispers] "Something up," I thought to myself, goes out and they would go, "Take your time, [whispers] take your time," laughs. Yes, her husband came and caught her in the car park with this other feller when they were leaving in the night. So there was a big bust-up. And I thought we can't wait, we've got to get this bus. She was running across the car park at the end.

So you were watching this going on?

Oh yeah.

So with Mettoys did they offer you any opportunities of getting on?

No, you got there did your job, and that was it. The only perks you had there was Christmas time. They used to do bags. They asked you if you had a boy or a girl and they put all boys stuff and all girls stuff in there, you know, and you could buy bags of them at the end.

Were these rejects?

Yes, rejects. So they got the staff to buy the rejects [laughs] and you know they are boxed up and everything really heavy to walk down the street and carry them.

So they trained you on the job, did they?

They'd train you there and then, you've got to do this, then show exactly what you've got to do. They'd put you on the machine then, and you had to remember to put them in their orders, all the cars, what goes in first. And when the wheels go on and stuff. And they train you up and they watch you. "Right there's your stuff, the bags are there. Fill them up," they said, "and carry on. Press your pedal." Press your pedal for being finished. You'd got a clock for when you'd finished one.

So that's how they timed you?

To tell how many you'd done, see. Say you'd done fifty cars there's be fifty on the clock.

So did you get paid more if you'd done more?

Well, yes. Say you had to do a hundred, and you got over a hundred, well whatever you had you'd be on a bonus. Never used to make it. Lucky to get a hundred out of me.

So did everyone keep to the standard rate or did some people try to get faster and faster?

Some were good there, mind. They'd been there for years. And they were excellent. They were fast. That's where they earned their bonus getting over there. By the time I learned it, lucky to get fifty, never mind a hundred out of me. It takes time and experience to do it fast. With the cars you had to be really fast. With the others you had to make sure you glue every part, so it didn't fall apart when you were doing the garages.

So each person did their complete job? A complete job on the little car?

You had to, yes. You were all on different cars. When they came down near the end you had trays on the side, say you had 4 or 5 different ones, you had to check the cars, put them on the tray and you had to be fast doing it. There was inspectors at the end after you and they were fast, faster than us.

Were the inspectors all men, or women?

All men.

No women?

Only men you see, they'd fetch your stuff up. You'd catch a man [gestures] he'd come up and see what you'd got, and go down and fetch it for you then. If you run out of wheels or windows or whatever it is, then you had to stop then, till they come. Make sure there was just a quarter there before you call him. It would take him a half hour to get down to the other place to fetch your stuff up.

Did the inspectors get paid more or less than the people on the line?

I dunno. I don't think it was any more you know.

The other women working did they also have families?

Oh yeah that's why we went on that shift, they would be home in time, their husbands perhaps to take over, or their mother would take over for them to go out and work. They couldn't go out in the day to work, cause they had the children. And my Gran had had a stroke, I was by here every day from Penlan over here. I started at 6 in the morning. Get up see to the kids, had them in school by half past eight the oldest one. I had the baby with me then, I had to see to her [grandmother], then I had to be back home. Do dinner. I had to pick him up from nursery, walk from Clase back to the nursery to pick him up. Up to Penlan dinner everything ready, and I'd be out the house with the children at 3. And of course my friend she was on different shifts, so I'd have her two and she'd have mine. Then if Ron wasn't home in time, I'd have the four kids lined up on the wall. "Don't you move off there," and my bus would come and my husband would be coming up and he'd wave to me. So I said "right stay there he'll pick you up now" I'd get on my bus, he'd get off and he'd take them four kids home. So Ron's on continental shift, and she [Margaret's friend] was on shift work, so one or two times she and I used to have her kids so that's how we work it between us the two of us.

How much were you paid in Mettoys do you remember?

No, haven't got a clue I been thinking of that, and I just couldn't think.

No point in asking what you spent the money on that's obvious, isn't it?
Yes. On the kids.

Was there a trade union in Mettoys?
Not that I know of. I never had a trade union there.

Were there ever any strikes or disputes going on in either factory?
No, never had any of those.

Anybody you know of have any accidents in Mettoys? Or injuries?
They wouldn't have told us anyway. If there was, I wouldn't have known, no.
Well, you couldn't have heard them anyway if they did talk about it.

Did either of the factories have music on when you were working?
Yes, Addis did yes. It was like a Tannoy, they could get in touch with us then, and they'd say so and so come from this department, so and so come from that department, and we used to have music on. Well, you couldn't have heard it in Mettoys it was pointless, so much noise with all them machines going.

Did they give you holidays on the evening shift?
No, not really, you weren't working enough hours for it.

And the buses, you had to pay for the buses, there weren't any works buses?
No bus in Addis. You'd have buses come when you finished work, all different buses going to different areas, and the bus stops used to be across the road. Queue up some'd go the other way to Penclawdd, they'd go the other way, and you had to be out. If you missed it, we were lucky, we had two buses. We had one that goes to Morryston and another one that goes to Brynhyfryd. So if you missed the Morryston you'd get the Brynhyfryd and then get off down the bottom and then walk the rest of the way up Gwyrosydd, the other'd go to Brynhyfryd, the other one up Clase to Morryston. If not you'd got to walk then, next bus stop up by the Cross.

So did you keep in touch with anyone from Mettoys after you left?
Well no. I moved then over here then see. Cause I had to look after my grandmother. And we moved over here then.

So you weren't happy at Mettoys then?
No. I don't think anyone liked it at Mettoys to be honest. You had to go for work. Because the kids were young and she [Margaret's friend] had two, then had another little girl, then she had two boys and a girl, she only had the two boys then, but he was home in time for her to go to work.

Just how it fitted in with the family?
Well you had to, you know. Ron used to work in Mettoys and he was shift work. Course I couldn't go out to work then, but then he came out of work and he went days then. It was alright you know. That's why I went out to work in the evenings.

So did you keep any photographs of anything there?

No we didn't do any photographs then too busy going out, mon, dancing.

Didn't keep any photographs of you going out dancing?

No. No one much took photographs then.

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