

## LLEISIAU O LAW R Y FFTARI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

### Ffatri Metal Box, Castell Nedd

Cyfwelai : VSW046 Mrs Mair Matthewson

Dyddiad : 27/09/2012

Cyfwelydd : Catrin Stevens ar ran Archif Menywod Cymru

*There is an English summary at the end of the Welsh text*

**(Noder ei thafodiaith gref na ellir ei hadlewyrchu'n llawn yn yr adysgrifiad hwn. At hyn defnyddia lawer o eiriau Saesneg wrth iddi drafod materion technegol ynglyn â'i gwaith)**

(Recordiodd Mair atgofion ei phlentyndod a blynyddoedd y Rhyfel yn Abertawe i Brosiect Hanes Llafar Merched y Wawr sydd bellach yn Sain Ffagan 2000-2001 a gweler y wefan [www.hanesmerchedcymru.merchedywawr.com](http://www.hanesmerchedcymru.merchedywawr.com) / Yr Ail Ryfel Byd/ Bomio)

Mae rhyw anghysondeb yn ei dyddiadau yn y ffatri. Dywed iddi weithio yno am 25 mlynedd o 1946/7 – tan 1972 felly - a chafodd wats aur gan y cwmni i nodi hynny. Ond roedd yno meddai hefyd yn 1977 adeg jiwibili'r frenhines a derbyniodd focs addurnedig i brofi hynny. Er ei holi am hyn nid yw'n gallu egluro'r gwahaniaeth hwn.

### Y CYFWELIAD

Cyflwynodd Mair ei hun fel Mrs Mair Matthewson (Rosser cyn hynny) yn byw yn Birchgrove ac wedi byw yno erioed.

Dyddiad geni: Chwefror 1af, 1925

Cefndir: Ei thad yn grydd – bu'n gweithio yn y gwaith glo ond pan oedd yn 17 oed collws ei goes yn y gwaith glo – cas e £12 am golli ei goes a chyda hyn aeth i ddysgu *trade* fel crydd. Doedd e ddim yn gallu gwneud fawr ddim arall.

Ei mam cyn iddi briodi yn 14 oed wedi mynd i Ystalyfera yn *nanny* i blentyn bach, yna aeth i weithio mewn tŷ mawr ar dop Dreforys ac yn y diwedd pan oedd hi'n 18 oed roedd hi'n

gweithio yn y Bridge (tafarn) ar draws yr hewl fan hyn. Y Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf ymlaen yr amser hynny.

Aeth Mair i Ysgol fach Birchgrove (eto ar draws yr hewl) nes ei bod yn 8 oed; yna i'r ysgol fawr nes ei bod yn 11 oed, arhosodd yno nes ei bod yn 14 gan gerdded yr holl ffordd i Lansamlet i'r ysgol. Doedd hi ddim wedi pasio'r 11+ a doedd hi ddim yn sgolor felly aeth hi ddim ymlaen i'r ysgol fawr yn Abertawe - dim ond lawr i Lansamlet. Hyd yn oed petaech chi'n pasio'r 11+ i fynd i Abertawe roedd dynion yn methu cadw'u plant yno. Roedd hi'n nabod sawl merch glyfar na chafodd fynd yn ei blaen – gorfod eu tynnu mas. Dim ond pan ddaeth ysgolion *comprehensive* y daeth hi'n bosibl i ddynion cyffredin gadw eu plant ymlaen yn yr ysgol.

**4.00** Roedd ganddi ddau frawd ond bu farw ei chwaer yn ddwy flwydd oed. Roedd 18 mis rhyngddi hi a'i brawd hŷn, yna deg mlynedd rhyngddi a'i brawd iau ac yna ganwyd y chwaer fach dair blynedd wedyn. Aeth ei brawd hynaf i'r gwaith glo '**wrth gwrs. Mynnws e fynd**' achos bod ei bartner yn mynd. Doedd ei thad ddim yn fodlon o gwbl achos roedd e wedi casglu arian i dalu i'w fab gael *trade* fel *electrician* yn y Mond. Daeth e mas o'r gwaith glo yn 16 oed achos gas e dipyn bach o ofn – roedd cwmp wedi bod a dynion wedi'u dal tu ôl y cwmp. Achos bo fe'n ifanc ac yn sleit, hwpson nhw fe drwy'r twll a gwelodd fod y pedwar dyn wedi marw – un ohonyn nhw'n bartner iddo fe. Felly daeth e mas o'r gwaith glo pryd hynny. Yna bu'n gweithio gyda *contractor* gyda'r *oil works*. Yna daeth y Rhyfel a cas e ei alw lan a roedd e'n barod i fynd. Roedd e'n meddwl bod y gwaith glo mor ddanjeris â mynd i Ryfel. Ond gorfod iddo fynd nôl i'r gwaith glo achos roedd e wedi gweithio ar y ffas - roedd angen glo arnyn nhw ac roedd angen dynion oedd yn gwybod beth roedden nhw'n ei wneud. A dyna ble buodd e wedyn a ddaeth e ddim mas. Ei brawd iau – yn gweithio yn y gwaith tun yng Nghlydach. Yna cafodd ei alw lan gyda *conscription* yn 18 oed a phan ddaeth e nôl wedyn bu'n gweithio gyda trydan.

**7.00** Ar ôl gadael yr ysgol yn 14 oed aeth Mair i weithio yn y siop gig yn y pentre – gydag Arthur Owen. Erbyn hyn roedd hi'n amser Rhyfel – a hithau'n gwneud gwaith bachgen i helpu yn y siop. Gorfod mynd â chig rownd a gwneud ychydig bach o bopeth. Gadael ar ddiwedd y Rhyfel a'r siop yn cau – y perchennog yn cwpla. Yna aeth i weithio i Metal Box. Dim gwaith i ferched fel morynion bellach – ar ôl y Rhyfel. **Pawb wedi mynd mewn i industry yn ystod y Rhyfel a hithau eisiau gwneud yr un peth.** Odd arian da yna. Bu gyda'r bwtsiwr am 6 mlynedd a bu gartre am flwyddyn yn chwilio am rywle i weithio ac felly roedd yn 21 oed yn dechrau yn Metal Box (1946). Y ffatri wedi bod yno yn gwneud *shells* (y casys ac felly ddim yn beryglus) yn ystod y rhyfel.

**Yn ei chyfnod hi, pan ddechreuodd hi, roedden nhw'n gwneud y tins cyfan yn y canning ond ble roedd hi'n gweithio dim ond gwneud y tops roedd hi. Altrodd pethau yn ofnadwy tra bu hi yno. Ar y dechrau roedd pedair ohonynt yn gweithio ar yr un machîn – un yn ffido, un yn mesur, un yn tynnu off y shoot ac un yn pacio – 750 o dopie y munud.**

Newidiodd pethau wedyn – machîn yn ffido yn otomatig ac yn mesur (marc bach coch bob yn gant) felly dim ond angen dwy weithwraig – un yn tynnu off ac un yn pacio. Adran yr ‘*Open top*’ – symud o gwmpas yn gwneud pob un o’r *jobs* yma. Y pacio roedd hi’n fwynhau fwyaf – (chwerthin) yna’u doddi ‘acha *stillages*’ (gwaelod pren â harn (haearn) ar bob ochr a doddi’r *sleeves* o dopie wedi’u pacio nes llenwi’r *stillage* yn llawn). Ar y dechrau roedd y rhain yn cael eu hanfon i ran arall o’r ffatri ond wedyn eu hanfon bant i ffatri arall – Reading lle roedden nhw’n gwneud y tuns cyfan.

Pedair menyw oedd yn gweithio gyda’i gilydd ar un lein a tua 8 lein arall. Gwneud seisys gwahanol faint.

Cafodd gyfweiliad ar gyfer y swydd – llenwi ffurflenni i roi ei hanes ond dim gorfod dangos cymwysterau arbennig. Dim dewis ble i weithio yno – ond yn ystod ei gyrfa yn y ffatri bu ym mhob adran fwy neu lai yn eu tro. 25 mlynedd yn ddi-stop.

**13 00 ‘On i’n hapus iawn ‘na, y lle gore fues i’n gwitho’.** Merched a dynion yn gweithio yno – ond yn gwneud gwaith gwahanol. Dynion yn torri’r shirts tun i’r maint roeddech chi eisiau. Y shirts yn mynd i mewn i’r *laquer department* yn gyntaf, wedyn i’r *scroll shears* i’w torri, a wedyn i’r *presses* lle roedd hi’n gweithio ac yna’u pacio a’u hanfon bant. *Tops* a *tuns* rownd i gyd ar y dechrau. Roedd y patrwm ar y tun ei hun. Roedd *printers* yn yr adran *laquer* – er mwyn stopio’r bwyd rhag dod i gyswllt â’r tun. Byddai’n mynd trwy’r ffwrne *laquer* 4-5 o weithie i gael y laquer arno. Roedd y ffwrne yn hir ofnadw ac yn dwym iawn. Dynion yn bwydo’r ffwrne ar un ochor, a merched yn gorfod tynnu bant ar yr ochor arall. Bu hi’n gweithio yno am beth amser ond roedd yn rhy fyr at y gwaith hwn – **roedd hi’n cael cwte yn bob man**. Eglura sut y bydden nhw’n creu’r patrwm ar y tun – patrwm ar y *rollers* – bob yn lliw. Mynd trwy bump o weithie os oedd pump lliw gwahanol. Fray Bentos yn dal i wneud hyn – rhoi’r patrwm ar y tun ei hun. Ron nhw’n gwneud tunie Fray Bentos yn y ffatri. Torri’r tun ar y *presses* – dau ddisg yn dod at ei gilydd, mor drwm fel eu bod yn torri’r rowndyn yn berffaith. Yna mas o’r *presses*, rownd *wheel* fawr a lawr *shute* a dyna lle roedd hi’n gorfod eu tynnu bant, eu mesur a’u doddi ar y ford.

**17.00** Diwrnod gwaith: Dal bws am 5.15 y bore lawr y Melin a chyrraedd erbyn chwech. Yna’r *forewoman* yn dweud wrthi ar ba fachîn i weithio. Cadw at yr un machîn lle gallai ond weithie’n gorfod symud. Cloco mewn – os yn hwyr gorfod mynd i weld y bos a cholli chwarter awr o bae. Os dros ddwy funud yn hwyr colli chwarter awr o dâl. Cwpla am 2 o’r gloch. Ar ôl bod yno tua awr dod â dishgled o de rownd ar drolis ar y dechre. Wedyn rhoddwyd machîns i mewn. Gorfod prynu ticedi yn y cantîn am y te o’r troli – methu talu gydag arian amdano, ond pan ddaeth machîns gallu talu gydag arian.

Cantîn fawr hyfryd yn y gwaith – hanner awr i fynd i’r cantîn am ginio. Yfed y te wrth eu gwaith. Brecwast tua 9 / hanner awr wedi naw. Shifft arall 2 i 10 o’r gloch. Amser cinio am 2 o’r gloch. Bu’n gweithio ar y tair shifft - 10 o’r gloch tan 7 y bore. Cantîn ar agor trwy’r nos hefyd. Rhai yn dod â fflasg a bwyd eu hunen. Bwyd twym yn y cantîn – *soups* neis yna a theisen, popeth yn cael ei wneud yn y fan a’r lle – *manager* yno; cinio iawn hefyd. Talu am y bwyd.

Toilet - **merch yn dod rownd i'ch relievo chi – reliever; rhoi deg munud i chi fynd i'r toilet.** 5 machîn a 4 ar bob un – felly merch yn mynd rownd i relievo pob un yn ei thro a dim rhaid stopo'r machîns. Erbyn iddi orffen mynd rownd roedd hi'n amser mynd i'r cantîn neu adre. Amser cinio gallech chi fynd i'r siope a rhai yn gwneud hynny ond hi'n tueddu i aros i mewn.

**23.00** Gwisgo *over-alls* gwyrdd ar y dechre ond ar y diwedd gorfod gwisgo *over-all* ond gallech ddewis eich un eich hunan. Cotwm – *wrap-around*. Gwisgo cap – dim eisie gweld gwallt a hithe mewn trwbwl drwy'r amser am beidio â'i wisgo. Dim rheol am sgidie ond cael eu cynghori i wisgo esgidie teidi a dim *sandals – tinplate* o gwmpas y lle ym mhobman. Cael yr *over-alls* gwyrdd gan y cwmni ond yna nhw'u hunain yn prynu'r rhai patrymau gwahanol. Cap gwyrdd gan y cwmni eto. **Menyg – ffaelu twtsh ar ddim byd heb fenyg. Menyg cotwm tew.** Bu ar yr *open top* yn neud *liners* am flynydde ac yna aeth i weithio yn ffido (feed) y *tinplate* i mewn i'r *press* a'i ddodi ar *shelf* ac yna byddai *suckers* yn pigo fe lan a mynd ag e reit trwyddo.

Rheole – dim ar y dechre ac yna fe ddodon nhw lefydd arbennig - sgwaryn gwyn ac roedd yn rhaid iddyn nhw fynd hwnt i hwnnw i smoco.

Rhai yn gallu cael cwte tost wrth y gwaith. Oedd rhaid i chi fod yn garcus achos roedd *fork-lift* yn codi'r *tinplate* ac wrth gwrs rhain yn dod â'r *tinplate* wedi'i glymu at ei gilydd gyda *binders steel* ac yn cael eu torri gyda *wire cutters* ar ôl eu rhoi yn reit ar y ford. Gweithio achu *platforms*, codi'r *tinplate* o'r ford – eu sorto rhag ofn bod rhai o'r shîts yn fyr, neu rhai â *buckles* ynddyn nhw. Sefyll fwyaf (er bod cadair yno ar ei chyfer) – oherwydd gweithio tri machîn – mynd o un i'r llall. Pan ar y *liners* gweithio un machîn ond tri machîn wrth wneud y ffido. Erbyn gorffen ffido un y lleill angen eu ffido. Gwaith eitha corfforol. **Yn y diwedd tynnon nhw'r merched oddi ar y machîns hyn a dim ond dynion oedd yn cael gweithio yno.**

**27.30** Cael eu cydnabod eu bod yn gwneud gwaith *skilled* – gorfod cael eich dysgu i'w wneud e trwy wyllo eraill – 5 ar bob machîn bryd hynny a'r ferch newydd yn dysgu pob un o'r tasgau yn eu tro. Bu hi'n dysgu gweithwyr newydd ei hun. Cael cyfarwyddyd ar y dechrau i fod yn ofalus wrth gerdded drwy'r gwaith. Stwr ofnadw yna – bob un o'r machîns yn gwneud stwr dychrynlyd. **Credu bod y sŵn wedi cyfrannu at y ffaith ei bod hi'n drwm o glyw.** Dim rhybudd. Clywodd fod y cwmni yn cynnig *muffs* ar ol iddi adael ond nid tra bu hi yno. Cymrodd fis neu 6 wythnos iddi ddod yn gyfarwydd â'r holl sŵn. **Pawb yn dysgu lip-reading. Hawl i siarad wrth weithio ond anodd gwneud hynny dros y sŵn.**

Tâl – pan ddechreuodd hi yno cafodd £3 30ceiniog (?) o dâl yr wythnos. Odd hynna'n arian mawr – hynny wedi cael cyflog o 5s yr wythnos yn siop y bwtsiwr. Lot o wahaniaeth. Gweithio Dydd Llun- dydd Gwener – dim dydd Sadwrn na Sul. Y ffatri ar gau heblaw am ddynion cynnal a chadw. **Bu hi'n gweithio ar y tair shift am saith i ddeg mlynedd ond dechreuodd y do-gooders 'ma ddweud fod hynny'n ormod i fenywod a'u rhwystro rhag gweithio shift nos. Felly stopion nhw'r menywod rhag gwneud mwy na dwy shift – bore a phrynhawn ond y dynion yn gwneud tair shift. 'On i ddim yn bodlon o gwbwl.**

**On i'n hapus iawn ar y shifft on i.' Wrth bod y menywod yn gwneud dwy shifft a'r dynion yn gwneud tair – roedden nhw'n newid dynion oedd yn gweithio gyda nhw o hyd.**

Codiad cyflog heb ofyn amdano bob blwyddyn oherwydd '*cost of living*'. Yn y diwedd yn ennill tua £40 yr wythnos. '**Odd arian da yna, oedd e'n ffyrm da i witho dano**'. Y bosys yn dod rownd bob bore ond hi ddim yn eu hadnabod. Cered rownd – y *managers* (nid y perchnogion).

**Ar ben yr adran roedd *superintendent* (dyn) – yna *supervisor* (menyw weithie). Ar y dechre dim ond edrych ar ôl y *machinery* yr oedd y dynion. Yna fe dynnon nhw'r menywod i gyd off y *feeding* a rhoi dynion yn eu lle. Pam? Rhywun yn conach fod pethe'n rhy drwm i fenywod siwr o fod ar ôl yr holl flynydde o fod wedi'i neud e. Felly bu'n rhaid i'r menywod ddysgu'r dynion sut i wneud y gwaith! Ansicr am y tâl – yr un peth. A phan stopion nhw fenywod i weithio shifft nos bu'n rhaid i'r dynion ddysgu sut i wneud yr *open top* hefyd. Tua 1963 y digwyddodd hynny.**

Undebaeth – hi'n aelod o'r *General Workers' Union*. **Bu hi'n *shop steward* am sbel.** Rhywun wedi dod ati a gofyn iddi a oedd hi'n fodlon gwneud y gwaith. Gwrthododd ar y dechrau. Yna cafodd fynd i *weekend school* i ddysgu sut i fod yn *shop steward* a dyna ddechrau arni. Dim cyfle i fynd i goleg i wella sgiliau yn y gwaith – dim ond derbyn hyfforddiant ar y jobyn gan y ferch oedd yno o'i blaen. Cael anhawster pan newidiodd hi ei gwaith – shîts mawr a hi'n rhy fyr a'r gwaith yn anodd iddi. Byddai'n gorfod stopio'r machîn a'r gweithwyr eraill ddim yn hoffi hyn.

**Chafwyd dim llawer o drwbwl fel *shop steward*. Yn yr haf yr oedd y broblem fwyaf gan ei bod mor dwym yno. Roedd y menywod eisiau tynnu'r *glass* allan o'r to, yna paentiwyd y gwydr yn wyn ac yn y diwedd cafwyd *sliding roofs*. Gweithiodd y rheini'n iawn. Yn dwym achos pan oedd y *tops* yn mynd trwy'r *wheels a'r presses* roedd tair *nozzle a chompond* (stwff gwyn – fel rwber i selio'r tops) yn cael eu rhoi arnyn nhw – ac roedd hyn yn dwym. Dim trwbwl am dâl.**

Dim ond dwy streic fu yn y ffatri tra bu hi yno. **Un ohonyn nhw am fod bachgen a oedd yn chwarae dros dîm pel-droed - 'Metal Box team' wedi torri ei goes. Bu allan o'r gwaith am sbel ac roedden nhw'n mynd i roi'r sac iddo. Felly '*no messing, odd hi up in arms*'. Pawb yn cytuno a phawb allan am ryw dri niwrnod. Y gweithwyr enillodd yn y streic hon. Methu cofio beth oedd y rheswm dros y streic arall. George Fish – ysgrifennydd yr Undeb, a Walter Noonan yn gadeirydd. Pawb yn aelodau o'r undeb - yn bwysig ar y pryd a phawb yn gorfod talu o'u pae am hyn. Ond chafodd hi ddim llawer o waith o gwbl fel *shop steward*. Gorfod mynd i weld y *supervisor* os oedd cwyn a wedyn ymlaen at y *managers*. Ddim bob amser yn cytuno â'r *supervisor* a byddai'n dweud hynny wrthi hefyd.**

Merched sengl a lot o rai priod yn gweithio yno. **Y rhai priod oedd yn 'chware hec' am fynd ar ddwy shifft yn unig a'u gwŷr ar dair shifft, achos wedi arfer trafaelu gyda'i gilydd i'r gwaith a.y.b.** Llawer o famau yn gweithio yno hefyd – dibynnu ar rywun o'r teulu i roi'r plant yn yr ysgol a.y.b. Rhai ohonyn nhw – y gwŷr ar un shifft a'r fam ar shifft arall

felly roedd rhywun yno bob amser i'r plant. Busnes y ddwy /tair shifft – hyn yn llechwith iddynt.

Ei gŵr hi yn gweithio ar y bysys, ond fe ddaeth i weithio i ran newydd o'r Metal Box – *machinery* mawr a fe'n gweithio ar y *crane*. Cwrddon nhw'u dau yn y bys yn mynd i'r gwaith pan oedd e ar y bysys! Bws arbennig yn mynd o Birchgrove i'r gwaith. Os yn byw yn y wlad neu o Glais – gorfod cerdded bob ffordd i ddal y bws. Gwaith bach tun yn y Glais - prynodd Metal Box e ac wedyn daethon nhw i weithio yn Metal Box a chael bws i'w cludo o Glais bob cam i'r Metal Box.

Pobl yn dod o ardal eang, o Seven Sisters, Port Talbot, Briton Ferry, pawb o'r Felin yn gweithio yno. Cannoedd yno'n sicr – falle mil yno'i gyd. Mwy o fenywod ond ansicr faint.

Cytiau yn y gwaith – syrjeri mawr yna a nyrs ar bob shifft. Os yn wael, mynd i'r ysbyty. Tair ystafell – un i roi triniaeth os wedi cael anaf, un arall ar gyfer gorwedd os yn dost. Cofio *smallpox* yn dod i'r wlad – a phawb yn gorfod cael *injection* – ei braich hi wedi chwyddo fel clustog a bu'n dost a chael ei hanfon adre. Gorfod gofalu dim gwaed ar y tops. Cofio un dyn yn gwitho ar ei machîn hi, yn cael cwt ofnadwy a gorfod mynd i'r ysbyty i gael *stitches*. Ysbyty yn y Melin oedd hi – bellach wedi cau.

**47.00** Gwylie – pythefnos bob Awst. Yn y diwedd newid hyn fel bod modd cymryd y gwylie unrhyw bryd arall. Ond llawer yn dal at fis Awst gan mai dyma pryd roedd y plant ar wyliau. Y ffatri ar gau heblaw am gynnal a chadw. Paentio – a.y.b. **'Odd y lle yn cael ei gadw yn hyfryd cofiwch'.** **'Dyna un o'r llefydd gore ar y pryd hynny i witho ynddo weden i.'** Odd e'n lân. Pan on nhw'n torri'r tun – dwst mân fel aur dros eu dillad i gyd. Ddim yn gwybod a oedd e'n mynd ar ei hysgyfaint hi neu beidio. **Pan oedd y shît yn dod allan - tylle ynddo i gyd fel skeleton.** Wythnos cyn y Nadolig cael caniatâd i daclu'r lle â'r rhain trwy eu hongian i fyny – fel addurniade Nadolig. **On nhw'n disgleirio.** Cael y *bank holidays* i gyd bant – dydd Nadolig, Pasg – dydd Gwener, Sadwrn, Sul a dydd Llun Pasg. **Pawb ddim yn mynd i'r cwrdd – lot eisie newid i gael dydd Mawrth bant yn lle dydd Gwener i fynd i'r Gymanfa.** Trio nhw newid e ond rhai yn erbyn hynny – rhai yn cynnal eu Cymanfa ar y dydd Gwener. **Mynd i mewn i'r offis i ddadlau a dweud na fydden nhw'n dod i mewn ar y dydd Gwener.** Y rhain enillodd y dydd. Dydd Nadolig bant – os gwitho shifft brynhawn cael cwpla am 6 o'r gloch ar noswyl y Nadolig. Dydd Calan bant hefyd. Gwylie'r haf wedi codi i dair wythnos o hyd ar ôl iddi hi gwplu. Aeth hi i Ffrainc a Belgium gwplu o weithie. Mynd gyda ffrindiau ac i Butlins yn y wlad hon. Aeth ar awyrlong i Jersey – hen awyren â *double wings*. Olion y rhyfel yno – *bunkers*. Y tywydd yn weddol yna.

**Roedd clwb pel-droed yn y gwaith i'r dynion. Clwb i fynd i oefad (nofio) hefyd a bu hi yn y jazz band hefyd. Nofio lan yn y Gnoll yn yr awyr agored ond lle i newid yno. Buon nhw'n mynd i Bort Talbot am gyfnod hefyd. Clwb i bawb – dynion a merched a hi yn mwynhau. Dysgodd oefad.**

**Jazz band yn grêt – dim ond menywod ynddo. Taclu mewn gwyn a chotie coch, a hetie mawr a phig. Canu band *kazzoo*. Ddim yn gwybod ble bydden nhw'n mynd ar y Sadwrn**

– lan y Rhondda; Martsio. Weithie cystadlu a dod yn drydydd cwpwl o weithie. Arfer mynd rownd carnifals. Bydden nhw'n taclu lan *float*. Yr arweinydd ddim yn gweithio yn y gwaith – roedd e wedi gwneud sawl *jazz band*. Y gwisgoedd yn cael eu gwneud yn y Co-op. Bu yn y *jazz band* am tua 5 mlynedd. Dim tîmau chwaraeon.

Amser Nadolig cael cinio Nadolig yn y gwaith a ddim gorfod talu amdano – cinio a pwddin. Dim allan gyda'r nos. Yn cymysgu gyda'i gilydd drwy'r flwyddyn – mynd i dai ei gilydd.

Menywod i gyd yn hapus yn y gwaith ac roedd hi'n dwlu bod yna. Ond newidiodd pethe ac aeth y gwaith yn fwy caled. Yn lle 4 yn gweithio ar y machîn – 2 nawr ac yna disgwyl i un o'r rhain ofalu am fwy nag un machîn. **Y gwaith yn mynd fwy caled o hyd o hyd. Cwplodd hi yno bryd hynny – roedd wedi gwneud ei 25 mlynedd a buodd hynny'n strygl. Ond wrth adael gwnaeth beth ffol, achos ddim yn hir iawn wedyn cafodd y gweithwyr *voluntary redundancy*.** Collodd hi mas lot fawr oherwydd hyn. Dwedodd un ferch wrthi ei bod yn ffol yn mynd ond gan nad oedd honno yn berson o bwys wnaeth hi ddim gwrando arni. Cafodd hi (y ferch honno) a'i gŵr delerau *voluntary redundancy*.

Roedd hi wedi danto – wedi blino. Teimlo bod disgwyl iddyn nhw wneud mwy nag y gallen nhw – y topie oedd eisiau cael eu pacio yn pentyrru lan. Dim amser i fynd o un machîn i'r llall. **Peth bai ar y merched eu hunain – clatsho fel y mêl i drïo gwneud y gwaith – sylwi'u bod yn gallu gwneud mwy o waith felly torri nôl ar y gweithwyr. Rhybuddiwyd nhw i beidio gwneud hyn.**

Disgrifo'r tun sydd yn ei meddiant. Pan ddaeth y frenhines i ymweld â'r ffatri rhoddwyd tun mawr iddi a chafodd pob gweithiwr dun bach i gadw. Ar y clawr – y ddraig goch a'r daffodil a hefyd llew a rhosyn coch Tuduraidd. Disgrifio eto sut roedd y *rollers* yn gwneud y lliwie gwahanol. Tu mewn mae laquer. MB = Metal box. *Certificate* y tu mewn.

Gweithio *overtime* weithie ar fore Sadwrn o 6 tan 12 a chael mwy o arian. Os bydde angladd teuluol fe gaech amser bant ond colli pae.

Gwaith – yr un hen waith o hyd ac o hyd. Ddim yn mynd yn *bored* achos roedd pawb yn gweithio gyda'i gilydd. Os bydde'r machîn yn torri lawr – cyfle i gael *chat*.

Yn dal i weld un o'i ffrindie yn y gwaith ond llawer wedi marw bellach. Tîm o bump yn gweithio ar y machîn gyda'i gilydd.

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Ffotos/photos

*Clawr y tun a wnaethpwyd yn y Metal Box ac a dderbyniodd Mair Matthewson ar ymweliad y Frenhines Elizabeth II â'r ffatri adeg y Jiwbili yn 1977 / Cover of the tin made in Metal Box that Mair Matthewson received on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to the factory in the Jubilee year, 1977*





*Fedal a oedd yn y bocs uchod / The medal that was in the above box*



*Y wats aur a dderbyniodd Mair Matthewson pan ymddeolodd o ffatri Metal Box ar ôl 25 mlynedd yn 1971 / The watch that Mair Matthewson received when she retired from the Metal Box factory in 1971 after 25 year's service*



## *English summary*

### **Metal Box Factory, Neath**

**Interviewee :** VSW046 Mrs Mair Matthewson

**Date:** 27/09/2012

**Interviewer :** Catrin Stevens on behalf of Women's Archive of Wales

(Mair's childhood and wartime memories in Swansea were recorded for Merched y Wawr's History Project, archived in St Fagan 2000-2001. See [www.hanesmerchedcymru.merchedywawr.com](http://www.hanesmerchedcymru.merchedywawr.com) / Yr Ail Ryfel Byd/ Bomio.)

Mair says she worked in the factory for twenty five years between 1946/7 until 1972 but was presented with a commemorative box by the company in 1977 on the occasion of the Jubilee which seems to contradict these dates.

Mair was born on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1925. Her father was a cobbler who had worked underground but when he was seventeen he lost a leg in a mining accident. He received £12 compensation and went to learn a trade as a cobbler.

Her mother went to work as a nanny when she was fourteen years old, then she went to work in a large house in Morrision. When she was eighteen years old she got a job in a local pub. This was during the First World War.

Mair went to Birthgrove Primary School until she was eight years old. She then went on to secondary school when she was eleven years old until she was fourteen years old. She failed her eleven plus so went to Llansamlet School rather than go on to Swansea. Even when children passed their eleven plus they weren't given the opportunity to go on to grammar school. It was only when the comprehensive school system was introduced that ordinary people could let their children stay on in school.

**4.00** She had two brothers, but her sister died when she was two years old. There were eighteen months between her and her older brother, and ten years between her and her younger brother. Her sister was born three years later. Her older brother went to work in the coal mine because his friend had gone there. Their father wasn't happy because he'd saved money for his son to learn a trade as an electrician in the Mond. He left the mine when he was sixteen years old after a scare – men had been trapped there following a fall. Because he was young and slim he was pushed through a hole and he saw that the four men were dead – one of them was his friend. He then went to work as a contractor at the oil works. Then the war came and he was called up. He considered the coal mine to be more dangerous than

going to war but he had to return to work in the mine because he'd been working on the face. They needed men who knew what they were doing. Her younger brother worked in the tin works in Clydach and was called up when he was eighteen years old.

**7.00** After leaving school at eighteen years old Mair went to work in a butcher's shop in the village. It was during the war and she did boys' work in the shop. She had a meat round and did a little bit of everything. She left at the end of the war because the owner was retiring and went to work at Metal Box. The only other work available for girls was in domestic service. Everybody went into industry during the war. Mair would have liked to have done the same but she was at the butcher's shop for six years. She was then at home for a year before getting work at Metal Box in 1946. The factory had been producing shell casings during the war.

**When Mair started at the factory they made whole tins, and she worked in the section where the tops were made. Things changed drastically during the time that she was there. At the beginning, there were four of them working on the same machine – one feeding, one measuring, one taking the tops off from the shoot, and one packing – producing 750 tops per minute.**

Things changed with automation which meant that the feeding and measuring were done automatically, and so only two women were then required. She enjoyed the packing the most.

She was interviewed for the job and had to fill in a form but didn't have to show any qualifications. Workers couldn't choose in which section they worked. Over a period of twenty five years, Mair worked in every section in turn. She was very happy there.

**13 00** The men and women did different jobs. The men cut tin to the required size. The sheets went to the laquer department, were cut with the scroll shears, then went to the presses (where she worked), packed and sent away. They made round tops and tins to begin with. The pattern was on the tin. There were printers in the laquer department. The tins would go through the ovens four or five times in the process of putting the lacquer on. The ovens were long and very hot. Men fed the ovens from one end, and women took them off at the other. Mair worked there for a while but she was too short for this work, and would often get cuts everywhere. She describes how a pattern was created on a tin and how the tin was cut on the presses.

**17.00** She caught a bus at a quarter past five in the morning and arrived by six o'clock. The forewoman would then tell her on which machine she was working. She would clock in when she arrived. If someone was two minutes late they had to go and see the boss and would lose a quarter of an hour's pay. She finished work at two o'clock. About two hours after starting, a tea trolley would come round. They had to buy tokens in the canteen for the trolley – they couldn't pay for tea from the trolley with money – and could drink their tea as they worked.

There was a good canteen there and they had half an hour's break at lunch times. The canteen provided hot meals and workers had to pay for their food.

When she wanted to go to the toilet a woman would come round to take her place for ten minutes. There were five machines with four on every machine so a woman would go around to relieve all of them in turn so that they didn't have to stop the machines.

**23.00** Mair wore green wrap-around overalls, which were provided by the company. She was supposed to wear a green cap so that there was no hair showing, but always had a row for not doing so. She also wore thick, cotton gloves. Later on they were allowed to wear overalls of their own choice but had to provide them themselves.

There were no rules at the beginning. Then they marked a square area and they had to go there to smoke.

Some of the workers got nasty cuts. Care had to be taken in the factory because a fork-lift would lift the tinplate and bring it bound together with steel binders, cut it with wire cutters and put on the table. Mair describes her work feeding the machines. It was quite physical. They took the female workers off these machines which meant that it was just men working on them.

**27.30** They had to receive training to do their jobs and the new girl would have to learn every task. She taught new workers herself. It was very noisy there due to the machines, and Mair thinks this has contributed towards her being hard of hearing. After she left, she heard that the company was offering ear muffs to workers. It took Mair a month to six months to get used to the noise after starting there. Workers were allowed to chat as they worked but this was difficult due to the noise, so they had to learn to lip read.

When Mair started working at Metal Box her pay was three pounds and thirty pence a week. This was a lot of money compared to the five shillings that she had been getting in the butcher's shop. She worked from Monday to Friday and didn't work weekends. She worked the three different shifts at the factory before 'do-gooders' started saying that women shouldn't have to work the night shift. As a result, they stopped women working more than two shifts, while the men had to work three. Mair wasn't happy with this new arrangement.

There was a pay increment every year. By the time she finished there she was earning forty pounds a week. They were a good company to work for. The bosses would come round every morning but Mair didn't really know them.

**A male superintendant was in charge of the section. The supervisors were male too although a few of them were women. In the beginning the men just looked after the machinery but then women were taken off feeding the machines and replaced by men because the work was considered too heavy for them. Therefore, the women had to teach the men how to do this job. When women were stopped from working the night shift they had to teach the men how to do the open tops too. This was about 1963.**

Mair was a member of the General Workers' Union and was a shop steward for a while. She was reluctant to take on this responsibility initially. She attended a weekend school to learn about the work. There were no opportunities in work to attend college to acquire more skills. The only training on offer was from the other women on how to do the job.

She didn't have much trouble as a shop steward. The main cause for complaint was that the factory would get too hot during the summer. The women wanted to remove the glass from the roof. The glass was painted white and in the end they had sliding roofs which worked.

There were only two strikes while she was there. One was over a lad who had broken his leg playing football for Metal Box. He was off work for a while and the factory wanted to sack him. Everybody was agreed they should go out on strike in support. The workers won in this case. She can't remember the reason for the other strike. George Fish was the secretary of the union, and Walter Noonan was the chairman. Union membership was taken directly from their wages. If there was a complaint she would have to go and see the supervisor and then on to the managers. She didn't always agree with the supervisor and would say so.

There were both married and single women working there. It was the married women who were most angry about being taken off the third shift (the night shift) because they had normally travelled to work with their husbands. There were mothers with young children working there too. This was possible because the mother would work one shift, and the father would work a different shift.

Mair's husband worked on the buses but later on came to work in the new part of Metal Box operating a crane. They met on the bus when she was on her way to work and he was working on the buses. There was a special bus that went from Birchgove to work. If somebody worked out in the countryside or in Glais they had to walk to work. There was a small tin work's in Glais which was bought by Metal Box and the workers from there came to work at Metal Box. The factory laid on a bus for them. Workers came from a wide area – from Seven Sisters, Port Talbot, Briton Ferry. There were approximately one thousand people working there.

There was a large surgery in the factory and a nurse was present every shift. There were three rooms – one for treating wounds, another for workers to lie down if they were feeling unwell. Mair remembers the small pox epidemic. Everybody had to have an injection. Mair's arms become swollen and she was sent home from work. If they cut themselves they had to ensure they didn't get blood on the tops. She remembers one man getting a terrible cut and had to go to hospital.

**47.00** There was a fortnight's holiday during August when the factory would be shut, although this was changed later on so that workers could take their holidays on other dates. However, some still stuck to August in order to take their holidays.

Mair says of the factory, **“The place was kept lovely, mind. It was one of the best places to work in at the time.”** The factory was clean but cutting the sheets created a lot of dust,

which would be over their clothes. She doesn't know whether it got onto her chest. **When the sheet came out it was full of holes, like a skeleton.**

**A week before Christmas they would have permission to decorate the place.** Mair would be off on bank holidays – Christmas day, Good Friday and Easter Monday. Some wanted to change the days off from the Friday and Monday at Easter to the Monday and Tuesday, however others were against the change because they wanted to go to the Cymanfa Ganu in the chapel. Workers working the afternoon shift on Christmas Eve could finish at six o'clock. New Year's Day was also a day off. By the time she finished at Metal Box, her two weeks off during the summer holiday had increased to three. She went away to France and Belgium a few times but sometimes stayed in this country and went to Butlins with friends.

**There was a work's football club, a swimming club and a jazz band, of which Mair was a member. The swimming was up in the Gnoll in the open air, but there was a place there to get changed. This is how Mair learnt to swim.**

**The jazz band was women only, and they dressed in red and white, with large peaked hats. They would go to places like the Rhondda on a Saturday to march and took part in competitions. They went round carnivals and would dress up a float. The leader didn't work at Metal Box. The uniforms were made at the Co-op. She was in the jazz band for five years.**

At Christmas time they would have a free Christmas dinner in the canteen. There was no party in the evening. The women would socialise by going to other people's houses.

The women were happy in the factory and Mair loved working there. But things changed and the work got harder. When the number of women per machine was decreased to two, they were expected to look after more than one machine. The work got harder and harder. She was tired and fed up, and left then after twenty five years service, but shortly after the workers were offered voluntary redundancy so she lost out.

With the changes that were implemented, there wasn't sufficient time to go from one machine to the other.

When the Queen paid the factory a visit she was given a large commemorative tin and every worker was given a small tin. There was a red dragon, a daffodil, a lion and a Tudor rose on the lid. She describes how the rollers did the different colours.

Mair sometimes worked overtime on a Saturday morning between six and twelve. Time off for personal reasons such as a funeral was possible, but it meant losing pay.

She didn't find the work monotonous because everybody worked together. If the machine broke down they would have an opportunity to have a chat.

Mair is still in contact with one of her friends from the factory but many of her other colleagues have died.