

**VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI**

**JR Freeman's Cigar Factory – Caerdydd/ Cardiff**

**Interviewee:** VSE078 Margaret Duggan  
**DOB:** 10/5/47  
**Date:** 11/8/2014  
**Interviewer:** Catrin Edwards for Woman's Archive of Wales / ar  
ran Archif Menywod Cymru

**\*\*NB There is an embargo on a part of this interview from 13:10 to 20:44. The interviewee does not want this part of the interview used in any way. \*\***

**\*\*DS Mae gwaharddiad ar ddarn o'r cyfweiliad isod rhwng 13:10 a 20:44. Nid yw'r cyfweilai yn fodlon i'r darn yma gael ei ddefnyddio mewn unrhyw fodd. \*\***

Margaret Duggan says she was born in Ireland in county Limerick. She says that her father worked in a creamery and her mother was a housewife. She has one brother and 2 sisters. Her brother is a carpenter one sister's a civil servant and the other was a nurse but is now a housewife. She says she couldn't wait to leave school. She says she did her primary education in Ireland and then a 2 yr domestic economy course in the tech in Newcastle West. She would cycle everyday to school. She says her first job was a cook in a private house but she had to work 7 days a week. She started work at 8.15 am. She was 17 when she left school. She wanted to leave and earn her own money because she was the oldest of 4 children and they were always a bit short of money.

04:26

She always gave her mother some money and when her wages went up she gave her mother more money. She then went to work in a shop that she didn't like at all. Then she says the industrial revolution hit Ireland and the Americans came and opened factories close to Shannon airport. That was c. 1965. There were loads of jobs. Money was better and conditions were. She talks about finding work. She talks about working in a bar

when she was underage and was caught by the Garda. She then went to work for General Electric. It was called EI - Emerald Isle. She stayed there from 1966 to 1970. She was made redundant because she was 'last in'. She then went to Dublin to work in a hospital but later went back to EI. She talks about catching a bus 50 miles to go to work. They had to start at 5.40 am and not get back until 6.40.

11:41

When she left EI she'd met her now ex husband and he was working in Wales. Her best friend was going out with his brother. She says that's why they came to Wales. She says they moved in with his sister Bridget and her children. Her husband came from northern Ireland.

**(Embargo)**

13:10

**(End of embargo)**

20:44

She talks about her wages and how they were paid in Ireland. She says that if they were late for work they were fined 10/- for 4 weeks. She talks about how she saved and spent her money. She earned £7/10/- She would save 10/- and then she would give her mother £2/10/- and the rest of the money was hers to spend.

When she came to Cardiff they got better wages. She says they were supposed to start work at 7.30. They were allowed 3 mins after 7.30 to clock in. If you clocked in after that, they were docked by 15mins.

23:01

She says that when she started she was put on a machine to make cigars.

"There were 2 people on a machine in those days and there was one who started to make what we called the 'bunch'. You'd put leaf on a dye. The dye would then take that leaf over to the drums and coming down from a 'hopper' on the machine was filler that went into this leaf that this buncher had put on the dye... There was a buncher and a roller on the machine and I was put on to be a roller. So, the buncher would put on leaf that didn't have holes in it, but the roller had to put perfect leaf on and that would be the outside of the cigar."

She says that she started having training but caught her hand in the machine the first couple of days so she was off for 3 weeks after getting 8 stitches. She says she'd never had a day on the sick before. But they paid her when she was off sick. She says she was taken to St David's hospital and she was very frightened. Her whole hand was swollen. She thinks it was the buncher's fault, because they used to get impatient.

25:52

When asked if she was given compensation she says that eventually she was.

"When I came back... the union... I didn't know anything about compensation and all that, and they said there'd be a claim put in for me.... £180 or something I had. That was back in 1970 and it was a lot of money."

She says that she didn't go back on the machine when she got back because she was having physiotherapy so they put her on another job. The roller would put 500 cigars in a tin. Her job was to collect the tins and which all had numbers corresponding to the machines. She then weighed them. She was called a check weigher.

"Every morning you'd be given a weight to have the cigars at, with the tins of 500 - you were allowed 10 either side of that - and if the tin was overweight or underweight, you weighed 50 to see what they were - and then you adjusted the machine accordingly. When you recorded the weight of the tin that would correspond with the number on their card. If I collected 5 tins from them, I would have the time I collected it on their record card and then I would be writing it in my sheet with the weight on it. "

She says the girls on the machines would earn bonuses. The leaf would be weighed and one of the leaf weighers would go out and do a test with the girls to see how many they could get out of 4oz of leaf. They were target setters and the target would go up on the board. If the women could get more out of that leaf they'd get a bonus for it. At the end of the day there were targets of so many to get out. If you got more than that you were given a bonus. She says she wasn't given a bonus. She was on a set wage.

31:10

When asked why she enjoyed her job so much, MD says she just loved. She says she doesn't think she would have liked to be on a machine. She liked the freedom of being able to walk around and talk to different people and do her work.

32:00

When asked how much she was paid she doesn't quite remember but thinks it could have been around £12 per week. She says she got more than she did in Ireland. She says she was paid more because she was on a set wage and couldn't make it up. But she still didn't make as much money as a fast worker on a machine could have made. But she thinks she had more freedom and didn't have the pressure they had. Things came easy to some of the machinists but not so to others.

33:40

When asked where she travelled from to work she says that she was coming from Riverside. There was a works bus from Victoria Park that picked them up on Ninian Park road. She explains the route of the bus. She says they'd go down to Grange town and turn into Court Road by the Neville pub. They'd be dropped off on Penarth Road. Although it was a special bus they still had to pay their fare. She says there were 7 buses coming from the valleys in the 70s, they had to pay for their buses as well. They were subsidised and some people in Cardiff paid more to get to work than they did. She started work and clocked in at 7.30.

36:04

They would have a break of 10 mins at 10am. There was a works canteen where they could have a drink and something to eat. In the early days there were two canteens - one for the office staff and supervisors and a big canteen for the factory floor workers. In the morning, the hooter went when it was time to start but she doesn't remember if there was a hooter for beginning/end of break. Then there's be another break at 1230 for half and hour. The breaks would be staggered because there were more people working in Freemans than spaces in the canteen. She says they used to work until 4 and she can't remember if there was a break in the afternoon or not. They eventually brought in tea bars. If you wanted to have a drink there were machines in the tea bars. She thinks that the morning drinks used to be free when she started there.

38:10

She says when she started in 1970, they used to have to put their coats and handbags in a cloakroom in the morning. You couldn't take your coat or food into the factory. The only time you could go back to the cloakroom was during one of the breaks or lunchtime. They had to change into and overall in the morning. They were green nylon overalls that were supplied by the company. MD says that you couldn't take them home and they were washed by the company. Eventually they were allowed to take them home and wash them themselves. She says that when she first arrived she hated the smell of tobacco when she went in in the morning it was so strong. But she says you got used to the smell and didn't notice it after a bit. She says that the conditions improved even in the time she was there. They were always cleaning the dust and there was a lot of dust. They were provided with a mask if they wanted to wear one, but most people didn't want to wear one. But they cleaned the factory a lot. She says that sprays would come on many times a day to dampen down the tobacco. There would be a fine mist to keep the tobacco moist. It wasn't very hot most of the time. Sometimes it was hot and they had air conditioning.

40:59

She says

"When I went there first the radio would be put on so many times a day over the tannoi so that you could hear it. Oh we used to love that. But eventually we had headphones with radios on them, just have your own individual radio on."

She says they all used to sing in the beginning. When asked when did the radios change to being individual, she says that health and safety came in and over so many decibels they had to have head phones on. So they put the radios in the headphones. That was in the 80s. She says that they had to have a hearing test every now and then and an eye test. The factory would provide those.

When asked if she thought her hearing was affected she says maybe it was but she doesn't know that it was.

42:35

She says that she then went to work in laboratory, because things were changing and her job would have been obsolete. They were bringing in machinery to do a lot of the jobs. They didn't need the buncher anymore - the person that made the wrapper of the filling. She thinks that over a 1000 people worked there when she first started but it was hard to say because there were many rooms. When you first entered the factory you came into to the filler prep room. There were silos full of filler that would be filled with fork lift trucks.

44:25

"On the left hand side you had the liquoring room where the leaf would come in all dried and had to be put into liquoring machines to moisten it and make it supple again. Then you had the making room, because from the filler - the prep room - that filler came into the making room to be put in to make the bunches, which was the filler that went into that wrap. And from the liquoring room the leaf came for the rollers. Then after the making room... you had what was called the borders where they pushed the cigars out onto boards.... Then from the boarding they would be sort of pressed and they would go into the drying room and they would stay there over night."

She talks a bit more about her work in 'weights'.

46:26

"Then from the drying room, they'd be take out and they'd go to the packing room where they'd be packed and from there they'd go out to the dispatch stores."

46:53

She says they were testing for moisture in the lab. And the results from the lab would go to the Inland Revenue for them to work out the tax. She talks a little more about working out that the tax on the cigars and weighing the filler. She says they were weighed before they were dried and weighed after they were dried.

She says that she also used to do a finished order audit in her job. She talks some more about this. She says that at the bottom of every pack there was a date and a machine

number and that all had to be checked. She also would check the cigars. It was all recorded. When asked if this was later on she says yes it was. She says she left in 2002 when she was 55. She got early retirement and and a redundancy package. She received a watch when she'd been there for 30 years.

50:43

When asked if she though the her wages were good she says yes. She says that the cigar factory was one of the places where you got the 'best money' in Cardiff. She didn't send any money home once she got to Cardiff. She says that the other thing in Freeman's was that they got a bonus every Christmas and every Easter. She says that they were taxed to begin with but then it was tax free. She says that for every 3 years she worked she got an extra day off a year. When she was there 5 years she would get an extra 3 days. Eventually she was getting the equivalent of 2 weeks off a year and she had a long service pay of 12 days, so it was about 5 weeks a year holiday + bank holidays. Eventually they had a week off at Whitsun and at Christmas they finished on Christmas Eve and didn't return until after New Year's day, and that was 1970. The factory would shut down over Christmas and maybe Whitsun, otherwise they could take holidays when they wanted after application. She would return to Ireland for her holidays. When she started having more holidays she would go to Ireland and also take a holiday in the sun.

55:18

There was a union in the factory when she started working there - the Tobacco Workers' Union - and she was a member. The only dispute she remembers is for a shorter working week. The Union wanted them to finish on a Friday at 1.30 instead of 4 pm and the company said no. So in the end they just left at 1.30 on Friday Some didn't go but she was one of the ones that did. Eventually they got the 1.30 finishing time and that's the only dispute she remembers in the 32 years she worked there.

56:35

She says the conditions were good. It was just a bit dusty and very noisy. She says you get used to all that. She says they weren't a bad firm to work for though she used to moan sometimes. She says that later on if you were on the sick for more than two weeks you had to see the factory doctor. She used to suffer from depression occasionally and that was the worse thing they could do to her. On the whole the conditions were good.

57:41

She didn't become a shop steward. She was quite happy to do her work and get on with it herself. She says that she trained people but didn't become a supervisor or a trainer. She says that you'd get more money if you trained people. She talks of one person who trained staff but when she went for a trainers job she didn't get it. When the company asked her to train people again, she refused.

59:25

But on the whole if you wanted promotion and you'd done long service you'd get it. But that changed in the latter years, because they didn't need so many people and the unions weren't strong anymore. The first redundancies came in when they brought the machines in that started making the bunches. At the beginning they were voluntary redundancies and people who'd served longest if they applied for it they got it. She says that they gave a very good redundancy package all the time she was there - so many weeks for every 5 years you'd been there. She says that they had a few redundancies there over the years. But they didn't lay off anyone who didn't want to be laid off.

61:51

She says it was a workers market when she first went to work there.

"People used to come and they'd be working there - they'd go off and work in Butlins for the summer and come back again! You know... I mean at the end oh no way could you do that."

She thinks it was a good company to the end but she says that she wasn't there the last few years when Japan Tobacco took it over - JTI - Japan Tobacco International. She says she still receives her Smoke Signals (the newsletter) every quarter. "Anyone who's getting a pension from there would get one of those."

She says that when she first worked there they could have so many free cigars or cigarettes per month. She says that she would get 30 Sovereign. She says that she would get 200 B&H a month. She smoked for a short while but gave up. Because of government policy, anyone who started in Freeman's after a certain date didn't get the cigarettes. She expects if they didn't have a union it would have stopped for everyone. She got the B&H up to the day she retired and if the law hadn't changed she would still get them. Because the law changed, you were given them until you retired. So she used to sell them to a co-worker who smoked. They offered some of the pensioners who still received cigarettes money to terminate their contracts. Some took the money, others continued receiving cigarettes until they died.

65:51

They had sports and social clubs there. They used to have a pensioners do every year and take them out. The company contributed as well. She talks about some other benefits - £20 here and a hamper there.

67:22

When asked about any days out and trips, she says she didn't go on the trips but they used to have a pensioners day out every year. She says that years ago they used to have trips to the QE2 etc but she didn't go. They would have to pay - it wasn't free and it would be

a weekend day. The company also would pay for them to go on courses and she went on a computer course. She says there was a lot of training for them.

69:12

She says that they always had a Christmas meal in work - it would be a special meal for them. They also had a Christmas draw. In the early days they didn't pay anything but later they did. They also had a Christmas dinner at work and the managers used to serve them. They'd dress up in waiters and waitressing uniforms. They'd pay a little for it but not a lot. They also used to have competitions like "It's a knockout" and golf tournaments and badminton. She says she didn't get involved. When she finished work she'd finish work.

71:42

She still keeps in contact with friends from work. Tryphena was one of her friends and she was one of the bridesmaids at her wedding. She says she has friends that are a lot younger than her who keep in touch and older friends.  
"It was like a family place when you were working there. We had good fun. They were a good company to work for."  
She would still go out with the girls although she was married. She says there was a good female camaraderie. She still meets them now although the company isn't here.

73:07

When asked if it was one of the reasons she stayed in Wales, she says Oh Yes. She says that she planned to retire when she was c. 55 and thankfully she was able to do that because she'd had enough by then. She says that jobs were tough to come by by then and people were frightened about their jobs. She says that after she finished in 2002, her friends from the factory would say that she was lucky to be out of there. Things had changed so much.

74:33

Looking back she says -  
"I'm so glad I worked there. They were a good company, we got good conditions, good money - I enjoyed it."

75:23

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD