

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Anglomag – Bridgend, New Stylo – Bridgend, Revlon - Maesteg

Interviewee: VSE060 Rosalind Catton

Date: 22/5/14

**Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's
Archive of Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru**

0:00:00.0 Could you tell me your name and date of birth
My name is Rosalind Catton, 28/1/1943.

Tell me a little about your background where you were born, your father and mother if they worked that kind of thing and if you have any siblings.
My father was a carpenter my mother didn't work while I we were growing up. I was born in Cwmfelin. I had 2 brothers and sisters, one has died.

0:44 Tell me a little bit about you education then where did you go to school primary and secondary.
I went to Garth Primary and then I went to the comprehensive in **Llwynderw** and that was it basically.

1:01 When did you leave School?
When I was 15.

Was that something you wanted to do, or would you have liked to stay on?
At the time no, I wanted to leave school but now I regret it.

1:15 Why do you think you left at that time?
I think my mother persuaded me a bit that I should just get a job and that's what I did.

1:29 Where did you go and work then when you left School?
First job I had I worked in the little grocer shop in the corner shop but they closed down. So then a friend of mothers who in a factory in Bridgend said she could probably get me a job and I went there.

Which factory was this?

This was **Anglomag** they made rain coats

Did you have to have an interview?

No I don't think I did. I think she arranged it and I just turned up and that was it.

You started work straight away?

Yes

2:12 Did you need to do any training for the work you did?

No because I was basically in the cutting room which was separate from the sewing room. There were about 7 of us working there and they just showed me what to do so it wasn't training as such, I didn't have to do any tests or examinations.

2:31 No but you trained on the job then?

Yes

They didn't say then this is 6 weeks training then?

No

You just went in and learnt?

Yes

2:45 Do you remember anything about the first day you went to the factory?

No I think I was a bit apprehensive because I was only 15 and I didn't know what it was going to be like. But they were very friendly there and they mothered me really because they were a lot older than me. They were trained in cutting with these heavy machines which you were allowed to use until you were 18. I was just doing laying up, laying all the fabrics up you know, in colours ready to be cut.

Were you marking them at all or just laying them?

No I'd lay them all up in the colours, we'd do 1 size at a time and the pattern would be put on the top layer and I think they were marked with chalk probably and then the cutters would cut them out then I'd take all the pieces that were needed for that design. If I remember correctly you'd tie them up with a bit of spare fabric with the linings, the linings were done separately and then they'd go out to the factory floor where the buttons would be added onto the bundles or whatever the trim was on that design.

4:08 Did you take them to the machinists?

Yes I think I had a little trolley that was it as far as I was concerned. Once they were out there they were out of our control.

4:28 Do you remember how many of your worked in the factory when you started working there?

I think there were 20 machinists, it was a huge factory and like I said we were about 7 in the cutting room and there was a lady in charge of all the buttons and zips and whatever, all the fancy bits.

Less than a 100 then?

Oh yes

4:53 Was it mainly women?

All women, as far as I can remember. No men only the manager.

So the cutters were women as well?

Yes

5:12 Do you remember what it was like on your first day, I know you said you were apprehensive, but can you remember what the building was like that kind of thing. Do you remember any smells and sounds that sort of thing?

Yes the big room where the machinists were and there was our room which was quite a big room because it was where all the fabric was kept in there as well and there was a little office. There wasn't a canteen, it was just a little room and I remember there was a lady there who used to make us tea on lunch, which was basically beans on toast or something, because the facilities weren't there. Probably now it wouldn't be allowed, Health and safety and the environment and all that. No I can remember that.

5:57 So where exactly was the factory?

On the trading estate in Bridgend, I can't remember the name of the street.

6:05 Do you remember how much you were paid when you started?

It wasn't a lot. About 10 shillings, you're going back about 50 years mind.

So what year was that?

About 1958 I think.

Did that increase as you got more experienced?

Probably did but I don't remember. It wasn't a lot of money.

6:47 Did you do the same job all the time you were there?

Yes that was my job more or less, taking and fetching and whatever fabric they needed I'd get it out.

7:05 So What did you do with the money?

I gave it to my mother.

Did you have any pocket money?

Yes probably 5 shillings I should think. It doesn't seem a lot now.

7:23 Do you remember what you did with your pocket money?

I probably bought clothes. I didn't go out a lot because I quite shy when I was young, I used to like reading, I still do. So I wasn't a party person I was quite quiet. Used to go to youth club and dances on a Saturday in the Town Hall.

In Maesteg?

Yes. But that was it really.

7:55 Were you a machinist yourself, did you sew yourself?

No I can sew now, but I wasn't a machinist, you might have had to be a certain age to do that, because of the safety they were quite powerful machines.

8:19 You said that you weren't allowed on the cutting machine until you were 18.
I think you had to be 18.

But you didn't go onto to doing that?

No because I think they closed down. Because then I went onto the shoe factory, that was on the same site.

Before we go there, I'll just ask you a few more questions. How did you feel about working in the factory, that first factory?

Well the girls were lovely and I knew quite a few of them because they were from my area. I liked it although there was always a kind of stigma in the factory, I don't know if you found this. If you were a factory girl you were considered as being a bit more lower end

9:13 Did you get that from your neighbours or people around?

Yes people said you know factory girl, yes there was some snobbery I suppose.

How did you feel about it though?

I didn't mind, I don't take notice of that

What about your parents?

My father didn't like it. He never wanted me to go to the factory, but that was the choice I made.

What about your mother?

I think she was quite happy.

9:53 What would your father have like you to do then?

Well because I failed my 11 plus by a very small margin he wanted me to go to Grammar School and he wanted me to have an education. But I didn't pass it so I made the best choice I could then.

If the Comprehensive system had been there then, it would have been very different?

Yes

10:24 You said you knew people there were they people in School in with you?

No because they were older they were more 18-19

Were they all older than you then?

Yes I think they were

You were the baby?

Yes I was the youngest

10:43 What about unions - was it unionised?

I should think it would have been. My father was a staunch trade union man so he would have insisted.

Were you a member then?

I can't remember

Were there any disputes or anything do you remember?

I don't remember any it was quite a happy place to work. Although the owners were Danish they were quite nice. Two brothers they were.

11:25 What about the conditions there, what about lighting and heating?

I think so. I would have remembered if they had been bad.

You don't remember being cold or too hot?

No. Course you were on your feet all day and you'd travel by bus. Catch the bus at 7 o'clock I think. I think we started 7.30 if I remember correctly.

Was that public transport?

They were buses put on especially for going to the trading estate and dropping people off at various factories.

12:07 Did you have to pay for those buses?

I should assume so but I can't remember.

So you'd leave home at 7 to be in work for 7.30

Yes

Did you have to clock in?

Yes

And clock out?

Yes

How long was your day, when did you finish?

I think it was 4.30. It was quite a long day when you took in the travelling.

And on your feet all day?

Yes

12:43 What about breaks then, can you remember?

I think we had a tea break 10 or 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon and half an hour for lunch. Which was not long really.

Did you say so you didn't have anywhere to go for lunch?

Well this lady used to make us just snacks really and you could take sandwiches obviously.

But you didn't have a canteen?

No

Or a rest room?

No I don't remember a rest room.

So did you have to eat where you were working?

Well there was this small room or they might have taken it to where they were working.

Or I see you did have a separate room to eat?

Well it was very small, I remember. To be honest I wasn't there that long. Only a year when I'm thinking of my age and then I went to the next one.

13:56 Did you have to wear uniform or overalls?

No I have a photograph of what I have on if you want to see it.

I'd love to. Later?

Yes

14:14 Do you think the work was dangerous in any way?

The cutting machines were dangerous because like a jog saw machine to obviously go around the patterns, so they were. But I do remember them having guards. But I remember one of the girls having an accident. It wasn't too bad, but she cut herself and she was the one in charge in that room. Yes it was quite dangerous.

What happened to her when she had the accident?

I can't remember

But it wasn't too bad - she didn't lose any...

No nothing like that.

15:07 Were you made aware of Health and safety issues that kind of thing?

No it's not like it is today to be a lot different. We didn't wear any protective clothing or anything.

15:27 was it a nice environment to work in?

I was quite happy there, because the people were nice.

What about the physical environment was that comfortable to work in?

Yes

Did they play music in the factory?

Yes I should think it did. Every factory played music

Was that mainly on the factory floor then?

Yes I can remember now you're saying. In the cutting room we had a very old wireless which we couldn't get very many stations and I can remember going up to put it on and getting a terrible crackle on it, it wasn't very good.

You used to get something out of it?

Yes

Do you remember what stations?

Oh no 1958 I suppose it was rock and roll music we liked.

16:35 was it noisy on the factory floor?

In the sewing room it was noisier than the cutting room. Obviously as you had perhaps 20 machines going. Whereas in the cutting room it was only the one.

There was no protection?

No

17:01 Were people allowed to talk while they worked?

Oh yes

Quite a relaxed atmosphere?

Yes

17:10 What about the smokers where did they go?

Probably outside on their break I should think.

They weren't allowed on the factory floor?

No, I don't remember many smokers, so perhaps there were a lot of non-smokers but probably outside. You did used to go outside just to have a bit of fresh air.

17:44 How many days did you work a week?

5

Was there any over time that you could work?

Probably was if they needed more orders quite quickly, but I don't remember that. I probably did.

Were there any shifts?

No it was just the day shift.

18:18 What did you make?

Raincoats

Only raincoats?

Yes, very nice rain coats and hats sometimes to match.

So they were high end?

Yes

18:31 Do you remember where they went to be sold?

No because I wasn't involved in that part of it. Once it went out to the sewing room that was my job done really.

Were there any perks from working in the factory could you buy things cheaper?

You used to be able to buy raincoats, material if they had finished with the one colour and you could buy cottons once a range had finished, as they wouldn't need it again. Spring and summer were different shades. Some were fur lined, some leopard skin lined. They were quite nice raincoats.

19:16 Did you buy anything like that?

I probably did yes. I can't remember one but I most probably did.

19:26 Can you remember any pilfering going on?

No because we could buy the material quite reasonably. No I don't remember any. Because I was in this little smaller room, it could have gone on in the sewing room which we didn't see. No the girls in the cutting room were all quite honest.

So was it a mix of single and married women?

Yes

Any women with children?

Yes there was probably with children. Some of them were about 25, 30 perhaps, so they would have had children.

Obviously no child care facilities?

No

20:27 Were there any social activities organised by the workers and did you go?

No I don't remember anything because dinner dances were quite popular first, but I don't remember any there.

Was that because you were young do you think?

Could have been. Funny thing your memory I just can't remember going to a dinner dance.

21:00 What about a Christmas party or anything like that?

No I can't remember a Christmas party.

What about holidays, did you have paid bank holidays?

I can't remember.

What about the Holidays?

Yes I should think they were paid.

21:32 When did the holidays occur. I mean did the factory shut down or did you choose when to take your holiday?

No I think the factories closed, it was like the miners. You know when the miners had the same holidays and I think a lot of factories did the same. Because if the women were in the factory and the men were off.

So last week of July and first week of August?

Yes

21:59 Do you remember what you did on your holidays?

Yes I went to Porthcawl with my parents and that's where I met my husband. Only 15.

So did you go and stay in Porthcawl?

Yes in the caravan with my parents and my younger sister. My husband was with his parents and there were a lot of young people who I knew and we used to meet up on the beach. Then he asked me would I go out with him. I was 15-16.

How old was he?

2 years older than me. 17

22:47 Did you do that more than once, go on holiday or was it just that once?

I think it was the once because then we were courting and we used to go and visit relatives for holidays and stay with them.

So where is your husband from?

From Maesteg.

Not from this village here?

No I'm not from here, Cwmfellin I was born, I lived in Garth growing up.

23:24 Did you enjoy working in that factory?

Yes

Did you find it monotonous or boring at all?

No not really. I found it tiring because you're on your feet all time. By the end of the week you'd be tired.

But you were moving around?

Yes

23:43 Why did you decide to leave?

I think the factory closed they must have gone into financial trouble but I had a job immediately in the shoe factory.

23:55 How long were you in the first factory?

About a year.

Did you keep in touch with the people in the factory?

I did because I was bridesmaid to one of the other girls in the cutting room and yes we kept in touch for a long time. Then everyone seemed to move away and we've lost touch. I don't know if any are still alive now, because they'd be in their 90's.

24:27 Tell me about the shoe factory, what shoe factory was this?

New Stylo and that was a bigger factory, not as nice I wasn't as happy there as the other one. The people were slightly different and that was standing all day and I used to decorate the shoes. Put the bows on. So I used the high stapling machine, standing all day and just attach all trims that you needed on the shoes.

24:57 Did you have to go for an interview?

I think I must have seen it advertised, because they did that. I think they used to put it outside on boards. But I don't remember having an interview for that. You just turned up and asked could I have a job.

Did you have to be trained for that job?

No one person just showed you and you'd have the order, same idea would come through which trim went on what and you'd just put the trim on and off they'd go, you wouldn't see it again.

25:31 Was it a bigger factory?

Yes a bigger factory

A bigger building?

A bigger building and there were men working there. Obviously they did have a canteen I can remember that and most probably a rest room.

25:53 You said you didn't like it as much as the first, why was that do you think?

I don't know, the people weren't as nice. There were a lot more people and I was quite shy at that time.

How old were you when you went there?

Well I must have been 16 and I was only there a year again and then I went into retail.

26:26 Do you remember how many worked there?

No I don't remember but there were quite a lot. The room where the shoes were made was quite big, as there were a lot of machines as well.

Was it tens or hundreds?

Hundreds I think.

Were you mainly women or was it more like half and half?

Half and half I would say.

27:08 Did you find it different working with men?

Well there again the trimming room was separate from the actual factory so we were about 10 in the trimming room. So I didn't mix much. You only saw the men when you went to the canteen or if they were bringing things in, that sort of thing. You didn't mix with them

So were you all women in the trimming room?

Yes

27:45 Did you have to train to use the machines?

No. If I remember there were 2 trimming machines and I was on one. The other lady showed me what to do. There was no actual what I call proper training.

28:04 Do you remember how much you were paid?

No. It was probably a bit more because I was older then as well.

Was it just a basic wage or was it piecework?

I should think it was just basic wage.

I didn't ask you that about the first factory. I took it that it was basic if you were not producing anything?

Yes it was. The girls outside were probably on piecework. But we were on basic.

28:49 Were you aware of people being paid different rates?

No, the men probably were no I wasn't aware of it. Then again I was only there 1 year.

What kind of jobs did the men do?

Cutting out the leather, stitching and I don't know. Like I said I was isolated really in the other room. I don't think I took much notice.

29:26 Was that factory unionised where you aware?

I should think it would have been yes.

You don't know

No I don't know.

Do you think you were a member by default?

I might have been but I don't remember.

29:43 So was it the same kind of travelling to work

Yes it was exactly the same.

Was it the same start time?

Yes probably.

Did you have to clock in and out?

Yes

29:59 What about hours in the factory were they different?

No I think they were the same more or less in all the factories, because of the buses.

Were the breaks the same?

Yes.

But you said it had a canteen?

It had a canteen yes.

30:29 So did you eat in the canteen?

I probably did sometimes, others times no.

Do you remember anything about the food?

No

Do you think the canteen was subsidised?

I should think it would have been.

30:50 So the facilities were a lot better then?

They were, they had more toilet facilities and things like that, but most probably because of the size.

What about lighting and heating?

Yes I found that alright.

31:11 Tell me about those factories on the Bridgend Estate, when you went to work there at the end of the 50's were they fairly modern, did they feel modern?

Yes

When were they built, do you know?

Thing is after the war 43 they would have been newish and then I think they kept on building more and more. Because it is quite a big estate.

31:51 So what about that factory then how did it feel to be in there. Can you describe the factory to me?

Well our room was quite friendly; I can remember it being quite big and open. I'm trying to think. Basically I only went through every so often. I might have been sent out to get shoes and bring them in on the trolley, I can't remember.

Was it a clean environment?

Yes

So was it a pleasant environment?

Yes it was pleasant as can be.

32:55 Now you're a little bit older, were there any social activities organised by the workers, did you participate?

No I don't remember anything.

No Christmas parties then?

No. I had a husband by then and he wasn't one for socialising a lot either. So no I don't remember going to any Christmas parties.

33:24 Were the holidays the same as you had experienced before?

I would have thought so.

So there wasn't a lot of difference except for the size?

Yes

Do you think there was a different type of people there?

Yes I think they were. Their attitude was slightly different I think. Might have been because there were men working there as well.. It's different when you work with all women and then work with men as well.

34:04 I was going to ask you why you thought that was. Were they from a different area?

Could have been.

34:14 So you weren't as happy there then?

No

What about the employers in these two places do you think they were good employers?

Yes I don't really remember much about the employers. We didn't see them very often, the manager was there, and I can't remember if it was a woman or a man. I can't remember much about that at all.

34:40 But both places worked quite well did they?

Yes

They ticked over quite well?

Yes

34:45 Were people fairly happy in both places?

I think so

Do you remember any disputes or anything?

No

35:05 How did you feel about working in that factory, job satisfaction now?

I quite liked the job I was doing, yes.

Did you prefer that to the other one?

No. I don't think I would have left the other one if it hadn't closed.

35:25 Why did you prefer the other one?

The people.

Not the kind of job then?

No.

35:35 Did you make friends in this new factory?

Yes but they didn't live in Maesteg, not many did. So they were from Nantymoel, the valleys. So no we didn't keep in contact.

35:53 Were there lots of valley's people in both factories?

Yes.

It was a geographical thing then?

Yes

How long were you there for?

About a year.

You said you then went to retail. Did you ever go work in another factory?

In Revlon when I was married with the children and I did the 10 to 2 shift which suited me because I could take the children to School and then pick them up.

36:24 Can we talk about Revlon then?

You can do.

So when did you go and work in Revlon?

Must have been about 44 years ago, I was 26.

You were 26?

Yes

So that would have been end of the 60's then?

Yes Pam was born 62, Steven 63. She was 7, yes late 60's.

36:57 You had 2 small children then?

Yes

Were they both in School?

Yes

Was that why you went back to work?

Yes because I could do the 10 till 2 shift and my husband worked 9 till 5 anyway. I only did it for a short time. We were renovating our house and we wanted the extra money.

37:23 So were you going from to Revlon?

I just walked I was within walking distance

No buses or anything?

No

37:35 So When did you start?

10 o'clock till 2. It was a mother's shift.

Were there many of you doing that?

Yes there were quite a few.

37:53 Did you have to go for an interview?

I should think I did. They didn't in those days you didn't have forms to fill in like today. They asked your details and that was it if they thought you could do the job.

So did you have to train to do the job in Revlon?

No because you were doing different things every day. They would say you were going on a line and I didn't like it there. Its American owned, Revlon, and I wouldn't say they were a good company and the work was very fast and boring jobs. I don't think I could have done it for long, it was just a way of means of getting some money to do the house and that was it.

39:03 What did Revlon produce?

Perfume, soaps, talcum powder, lipsticks, nail varnishes all sorts of cosmetics really.

Were you mainly on a line then?

Yes I was.

And you used to do different jobs?

Yes

Were they all boring?

Yes. I can remember one in particular where these bottles would come down and I had to put a top on it and hit it with a mallet all day and if you wanted to use the toilet you had to put your hand up to leave. They would bring someone in to take you place because the line was nonstop production and I didn't like that.

39:46 Do you remember how much you were paid?

No.

Do you remember if it was ok money though?

Probably because it suited me the hours, I just did it.

40:05 what about the other women who worked there do you get on with them?

Yes I knew quite a lot of them because of a lot of people from Maesteg worked there. Some came from the valleys. One or two were quite, they talked a lot about sexual things, they were older, I didn't like that, and I thought it was inappropriate, but that's part of life.

Were there men working there as well?

Yes but I don't think the men were on the line at all they were mixing the cosmetics in other rooms and bringing things in and out and loading. They didn't so much in way of on the line.

41:04 Was there any kind of harassment going on, either way?

No I wasn't aware of that.

So would you say it was a different crowd altogether?

Yes

What about the work there was it dangerous?

I suppose it could have been depending on what you were doing. Sometimes you would just be making up boxes or packing things into boxes. The one that sticks in my mind is the one with the bottle and mallet.

41:48 Did you have to work with chemicals?

No it was all done in separate rooms.

What about heat, hot stuff and cold stuff?

No I don't remember.

You weren't aware there was anything dangerous going on?

No

42:10 Was Revlon unionised?

Yes I should think so because it employed a lot of people. I don't know how many were employed there but approximately 400-500.

Big then?

Yes

Do you remember any disputes there?

No.

42:39 How did people feel about the conditions there?

A lot of people loved it; they worked there for years and years and years. It depends on you and what job you were doing.

Was that because they were doing more skilled work maybe?

Well I don't think it was any skilled really..... it was made in another part, it was packed in another part and we boxed up the finished product and put the final touches on. I didn't so any of that work. They had a lipstick room, nail varnish room, face powder room, so I don't think I ever went into those rooms.

43:37 Were you aware of other people feeling a bit like you, they were unhappy with the work?

It was general comments, I'll be glad to get home type of thing. Fed up of this job and I think they used to give us the job no one else wanted to do. Because 10 till 2 we weren't regular what I class.

Do you think there was a hierarchy of people in there who had worked there a long time?
Oh yes

...gang system going on?
Yes

And you weren't part of that?
No

44:20 Did you feel very much on the outside?
No because I knew a lot of people there and my Aunt worked there, but I don't remember ever working with her. My cousin worked in the office there.

What about the facilities then. First of all the conditions, was it well lit well heated?
All factories have to be at a certain temperature and depending on what they make that would affect production, I suppose. It was alright and because I was 10 till 2 I didn't use the canteen. I don't think we had a break, we worked 10 till 2. Like I said if you needed to go to the toilet you had to put your hand up.

That's hard going.
Yes it is.

45:30 Can you describe the factory to me, was it a new factory what was it like?
They must have been pretty new as they were built after the war. Louis Edwards, Revlon and Silent Channel, which made parts for cars and tyres.

Was that called the rubber factory?
It might have been, I can't remember what it was called originally, but they were all together.

Silent Channel?
Yes I don't know where they get these names from.

46:24 What was it like walking on the first day as it was a huge factory. I know you were a bit older so you would have been a bit more confident and you knew lots of people there?
I don't really remember much about it. I just went did the job and came home.

So it was a stop gap for you?
Yes

How long did you have to work there for?
Well they used to take you on the then lay you off. It was when they had lots of orders to put out they would take on lots and put the 10m till 2 shifts on.

So they laid you off and took you back off?

Yes

47:08 Were you happy with that arrangement?

Yes it suited me at the time. I couldn't work because my son is epileptic, we now he has Asperger. So I never worked as such when they were small apart from that.

Was he in School then?

Yes, so I didn't work properly until they were much older.

47:42 Did you have to wear uniform in Revlon?

Yes it was just a white overall with sleeves.

Did they provide you with that?

Yes, I think we wore something on our head, could have been a turban.

Was it cotton or nylon?

Nylon I think.

46:15 You don't remember any accidents while you were there then?

No

What about the relationship between the men and the women in Revlon, was that ok?

Yes I think so.

After you got married how you did husband feel about you working, was he supportive?

Well I only worked 3 months before I got pregnant with first one so I finished work then when I was 6 months and I didn't work then up until the Revlon. I was married at 19 and had my first one when I was 20. I was almost 5 years where I didn't work at all.

But when you went back he was ok about that?

Yes he was fine.

49:12 Did you have holidays when you were there; I know you were on this kind of on and off.

Oh yes the miners fortnight.

Were you paid for that because you were on a on and off contract?

No I don't think so it was a temporary contract.

49:30 Did you join in with the social life at Revlon?

I don't remember anything.

Was there a social club there?

I think there was a social club there; I think they had dinner dances there. I only worked a few hours so I wasn't.

And you were married with kids and wanted to get home?

Yes

Was that the last factory you ever worked in?

Yes

50:04 Did you keep in touch with any people from Revlon?

No, I mean I see people in town in the shops that I know, but I know them apart from being in Revlon and if you worked in town in shops you know everybody.

How do you feel now about the years you spent working in factories?

I look back on it and it was a different part of my life. No regrets really of working there it was just not what I really wanted to do. If I had my time over I would have one and taught Horticulture.

What you have trained up in college?

Yes, that is my love and I quite like doing crafts as well.

I would have gone in for something different.

Landscape gardener?

Yes something like that.

Thank you very much.

That's ok

51:15

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD