

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

**Sobell's TV and Radio (later called General Electric (GEC) and then Hitachi)  
Hirwaun Industrial Estate, Rhigos**

**Interviewee:** VSE076 Christine Evans

**DOB:** Feb 11th 1949

**Date:** 1/8/14

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

NB The dog is howling and crying throughout the beginning of this interview because he was locked in the kitchen. He was let out after 8.40 and then the interview is quieter on the whole although he sometimes jumps on the sofa with me and you can hear him scratching!

00:40

Christine Evans was born in Aberdare. Her father's first job was helping in a furniture shop. He was then a painter and decorator then a sign writer. When her mother was young she was a nanny in the Black Lion, Aberdare

During the war she worked in the munitions factory in Bridgend. She then worked in Murphy's which was on the Hirwaun industrial estate. Her father was painting at Murphy's and that's how he met CE's mother in 1947. They married in 1948. She did have a sister but she died in 1995. In 1955 her father went to work as a fault finder in Sobell's.

03:06

When CE left school in 1964 and went to work with her father. She went to primary school in Cwmbach. Then she went to Gadlys School which is across the road from where she lives now. She finished in 1964 when she was 15. When asked if she was happy to leave when she was 15 she says yes. Looking back she wishes she'd gone to

college. At the time she wanted a job and she wanted to earn her own money. She went to Sobell's where her father worked. She had to do a test that she passed. She says she can't remember a lot but she thinks it was colours and shapes. They were looking for a lot of young people to start because the TV factory was booming. She remembers the record that was top of the charts at the time, No. 1 - "I'm into something good" by Herman's Hermits.

06:17

She says she had an induction when she went to the factory. Her first job was soldering and wiring. She says

"I got to do it alright but it was a bit fast. So I just had to learn to pick up the speed which I found was more difficult - more than the actual work. As it was in the factory there, you had to have a target and you had to do the target."

She says they were given a week's training she thinks.

07:20

She says she didn't have her full pay until she was 18. Her wages went up when she was 16 and when she was 18 she had the full wage. When she started her wages were only £2 or £3.

08:40

When asked what it was like on the first day, CE says she doesn't remember much. Her father was there and she was introduced to people but he was in a different department. She says a lot of them thought she was 'cute' because she was small.

09:56

She says she found the factory noisy because the air guns (?) were going off and the sound of the televisions going round on the conveyor. She says everyone was doing something different on the different lines. Some were packing TVs into the boxes etc etc.

"i was nervous in the beginning yeah. But like everything else you sort of get used to it. But I felt a bit better knowing my father was there, because he was there if I needed anything because at the end of the day I was only 15 like."

11:18

After she'd been there for a while she was told to go to another building where they were making transistor radios. Later on when she had a bit of money she bought her own transistor radio at a reduced price. "I remember being so proud that I'd earned my own transistor radio. I used to take it up to my bedroom in the night and listen to radio Luxembourg."

12:16

When asked what she did with her earnings, she says she gave some money to her mother. "She took some of it and she gave some to me and I could buy what I want." he says there was a canteen there but she used to take sandwiches and a flask of tea and her mother would make supper for them when they came home. She says that when she first went there they laid on double decker buses for the Hirwaun industrial estate. She lived in Cwmaman and used to get up early to catch the bus at 7.15. So she had to get up at about 6. The bus would come at 7.15 so she got to the bus stop at 7.05. The bus would take them straight to the industrial estate. In 1966, her father bought his first car so after that she had a lift. They would start at 8am so she would get there at about 7.50 on the bus. The car journey would be a bit faster. The buses would come from everywhere and she says the factory was so established they could afford to put the buses on. They came from Fochriw, Bargoed, Neath and further afield and there were buses laid on for everybody so there were buses everywhere.

16:11

She says that when she first started work they would finish at 5 pm. The time was changed then to 4.30. The buses were there waiting for them so getting to work and getting home was easy. When asked how many people worked there she says she can't answer that but it was quite a big factory. She says the lines were all women, but the factory had another part where the men would do the heavy work of lifting. Her father worked there doing the fault finding. There were people on forklifts and there was a man who used to do (?) the soldering irons.

18:20

She was there for a long time so she was doing different jobs. She was mostly on the line where some of the jobs were soldering and some weren't. Sometimes they would put the components in. There were wooden boxes called ops with holes in them like funnels. They had resistors and other components in them. The resistors were different colours and they had different diagrams to follow and had to put the resistors in the right place. She says it was like a jigsaw. There was a girls called the 'tracky' and they would call her o go and get any materials/resistors/ components etc that they wanted. She's go to the storeroom and replenish the supplies - she put them in the 'op' ready for the line workers. She says the work was quite fast and sometimes it was quite difficult to keep up. Towards the end, girls then put it over a solder bath and it was spinning round and it was all full of hot solder. And that panel went over it moving along on top of the solder, so you wouldn't have to solder. It would do it all for you. That's what you'd call the solder bath."

21:40

She says there were some women were using an air gun and it was on a spring. She says it was like a drill that drilled the screws in and it was quite noisy in the workspace.

22:06

CE says that she worked on quite a few different jobs while she was at Sobell's. She says that she had to put together different coloured leads using a machine. She had to put copper staples into plastic bars. She says some jobs were easier than others. She says she did so many different jobs that she doesn't remember them all.

23:47

She says that she worked on Colour TVs when they first came out. "There were panels called the decoder panels. I think it was the late 60s - It was a new thing that we were all excited about. It was either 68 or 1969. So I was on that line and they were called decoder panels and they were the same as the other panels but they had different components."

25:00

She says she worked with tuners and valves and still has a scar on her thumb. She says she put a valve in, put too much pressure on the valve. It broke and she cut herself with the glass. There was a lot of blood and she went to the first aid room. She says she also has scars on her legs. "At the time they used to wear mini-skirts. It was all the go wasn't it. But we had to wear overalls. But because our skirts were short, if any solder sometimes got on my leg, it used to burn my leg. And solder burn is awful! It's really painful!" She says they had to wear sensible shoes but they could wear mini-skirts as long as their overalls covered them. They could wear any overall they wanted in Sobell's but when Hitachi took over their overalls became uniform with their names on them. They had to buy their own overall. She says that when she started she was given a pair of pliers and a pair of cutters by the company and she had to keep them.

27:28

When asked if they were aware that the colour TV was cutting edge when they were making them she says they were.

"Oh - it was all exciting for all of us."

She says that she doesn't remember when they had a colour TV. Her father bought the TV and he worked in Sobell's as well. She doesn't think they had one straight away, but she doesn't think they were long because they could have a reduction.

She says that loads of people would knock on the door asking her father to mend their TVs. TVs would break very often at the time. Her father would say - "'I'll have a look to see what parts I've got" because sometimes he'd have a bag of parts on him you know. If he didn't and he couldn't get a part he used to tell them "if you can wait I'll see if I can get a part in work." He'd go back... and he used to mend the tellies and he'd get a few bob

you know... for doing it. He was quite happy with that. He often used to do it you know."

When asked if she thought that was above board, she says that she supposes it was but she doesn't know.

She says that the factory was firstly Sobell's, then GEC and then it was Hitachi. It became Hitachi in the 70s because CE finished in 1980. She was pregnant and having her son. She says she could have gone back because they kept her job open, but she didn't have anyone to babysit. She thinks that it stopped being Sobell's and became GEC in the early 70s.

32:09

CE says she was a member of the union in Sobell's. But she can't remember which union it was. When asked if she remembers any disputes she says there were loads of strikes. She remembers a three day week and thinks that was when it became GEC. It was the same when GEC became Hitachi because the work was drying up. She says when they were working a 3 day week they would have to go to the dole office 'to make up our money'. She says that the strikes were always about money and then about the 3 day week. When asked if they were affected by the 3 day week in the 70s because of the miners' strike she says "no not really". She then talks about a tip or a gasworks which they protested about.

34:46

When asked how their disputes about money were resolved, she says they usually had a meeting in the canteen and they usually won. She says she was very quiet at the time.

35:04

CE goes off on a tangent talking about hoax bomb scares. She says they all went home early.

35:55

When asked whether she thought the work was dangerous she says that when she was 15 she was put on a job and she was frightened of it. She had to use a wheel going very fast. She thought that she would damage her hand if it went in the machine. She says it was a polisher for the back of the radio and there should have been a guard on it but there wasn't at that time. She says not so long after they had to have guards on the machines but she says it was 1964 and there weren't any guards then. She says that she told her father and her father said that she shouldn't be doing it, because she was only 15. Her father went to sort it out and they told him that they thought she was older than 15. They took her off the machine because of her age but she thought 'For any age really that was dangerous.'

37:53

When asked if she knew of anyone having an accident while she was there she says yes but she didn't know quite where. 'I remember his name and his name was Tony and he was the iron boy. He used to do the irons and his hand was like that (she makes shape with her hand)... I do remember he had his hand off and he had a false hand.... He caught his hand in some machinery."

39:52

When asked if she thought they were looked after quite well at the factory, she says yes she thinks so. She says her father was well known. She says that some of the girls weren't very nice to her because she was quite quiet and she was picked on a few times. She remembers crying because one of the girls on her line was bullying her. She went to the office and they put her on another line. She says the new line was great. Every Friday night one of the women would arrange a mini bus for anyone who wanted to go and they'd go nightclubbing to Swansea etc. She says that she loved and loves music and dancing. Her current partner loves music as well.

43:10

When asked if they used to play music in Sobell's she says "Yes they used to play music and sometimes I used to take records there... and you could bring your own records in... We'd be singing away - we still had to work - but we'd be singing away to the music."

" I always remember this girl, back in the late 60s, there were bells around your neck - I never had one - but they used to have little bells around your neck which was hippyish really. At that time it was Love and Peace and it was all that."

44:58

When asked about the relationship between the men and women she says she doesn't know much about it but she thinks a lot of husbands and wives worked there. She says that later they started employing part time workers and sometimes part time workers would come in to work the evenings. She says she used to do a lot of overtime and she remembers working overtime on a Tuesday night and Thursday night for 2 hours and she used to work Saturday morning, when she would be paid double time. They were asked if they would like to do it and not told to do it.

46:47

CE said that she wasn't paid a full wage until she was 18. Then she thinks she earned 10 a week in 1967. She says it seemed a lot of money in those days. She says that they had a wage packet every week. They also had clocking cards and they'd clock in and clock out. They all had a certain number.

47:59

She says that she spent her money on records and make -up and nice things to wear and spending it on nights out.

She says that they ran a Miss GEC competition for a few years and would ask the women to take part. She tried it once , was very nervous and didn't get anywhere. She says it was because of her height because she's quite short. She talks about her mother being the same. She says she was given a make-up bag as a consolation prize. She says the competition took place in the Top Rank in Swansea. They went to Swansea because it was bigger than the Cardiff Top Rank. She thinks it was arranged by the firm. She thinks it happened in the summer and it was once a year for a few years. She talks about how she loved and loves dancing again.

52:20

CE she says that the firm didn't put on Christmas 'dos'. "The last day we used to work in the morning, we used to have our dinner, then after dinner then we'd all stop - the foreman didn't mind us stopping - and they used to come round then every line, the foreman on the line used to have a tin of chocolates - Quality Street or Roses - and they used to give us all sweets.... And every one used to bring drink in - we used to put it underneath the benches. And then after dinner we used to pull the drink out and we'd be drinking - having a drink -on the line like!"

"What did the management think of that?"

"They didn't mind. As long as we did our work in the morning they didn't mind us having a little drinking... some of us used to get a bit to drink and we used to have tinsel in their hair and acting silly and all that like... and I remember once we had one of those big plastic bins and one or two of the girls who'd had a few drinks - they used to grab hold of um.. I remember he was a bloke he was - a short bloke - and they pushed him into this bin for a laugh! Just a bit of isn't it?"

She says that they'd go home then and then later they'd meet up for a drink in the pub after.

54:41

CE says that they had two weeks holiday off for Easter, a week Whitsun and they'd have two weeks summer holiday - the miners fortnight. She says her father had a touring caravan and they used to go to Porthcawl a lot. She always holidayed with the family. Sometimes they went to Tenby but never abroad, although they went to Devon one year. They'd often go for day trips in her father's car - the seaside or Brecon Beacons. She says she never went on a trip from the factory.

56:38

When asked if she enjoyed work in the factory on the whole she says yes but she found some jobs harder than others. When asked about the camaraderie she says that you get all kinds of women there - some aren't very nice. But apart from the one line where she was bullied, the majority of the time she was OK and she says the women were nice and friendly especially the line that arranged the nightclub trips.

58:00

She left when she was pregnant after about 2/3 months because she wasn't very well. She worked in the factory for 16 years from 1964 - 1980.

59:16

When her son was 16, she went to college on a catering course and did an NVQ in catering. She had to do 2 work placements so she did her first in Asda and then went back to GEC for her second placement. She says that some of the workers she'd worked with were still there and they remembered her. That was 2001.

62:46

When asked if she'd kept in touch with people from work she says no. She says the 60s and 70s were a good time for her. She enjoyed the fashion and the music. She often looks back and thinks I wish I had that time over again.

64:18

END OF INTERVIEW / DIWEDD CYFWELIAD