

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Ffatri “Tic Toc” (Smith’s Industries), Anglo Celtic, Ystradgynlais
1947 – 1962 & 1971 – 1988)

Interviewee: VSW027 Joyce Evans
Date: 10th February, 2014
Date of Birth: 18th September, 1932
Interviewer: Susan Roberts on behalf of Women’s Archive Wales

Joyce was born on 18th September 1932 in Ystradgynlais. Her father was a tin worker in Ystalyfera tin works. Joyce was the eldest of two sisters. She started school in Glanrhyd (which was in the chapel) and then she went to Ynysycedwen school. She was fourteen years old when she left school. She didn’t have a job to go to when she left school. She had no idea what she would do after leaving school. At the time there only work available at places like the tin works.

00.00.58: ‘I wasn’t very good at school, so they hadn’t got much hope.’

Joyce’s uncle had lost his wife, and she used to go down and clean his house during the week, and make dinner at the weekend. She would earn five shillings a week for this work.

She said, ‘I thought I was rich.’

00.02.50:

Joyce remembers her father taking her down to the tin works, and seeing the women there cutting the tin, their hands all cut because the tin was sharp, and the men throwing the sheets through the rollers. He took her down several times. He used to wear white, twill pinnies when he was throwing the sheets around. There were no jobs available at the time – and Joyce may have had to go there if she hadn’t found other work.

00.03.45: ‘But I was lucky. Tick Tock came.’

She worked there for fifteen years before having her eldest daughter. She was ‘out’ for nine years and then returned for another seventeen years.

Tick Tock (Anglo Celtic) began when Joyce was fifteen years old. Joyce’s uncle was working in the Woodland’s garage and asked the manager Walton Williams (?), from Cwmllynfell, if he could give Joyce an interview. According to Joyce it was hard to get into

the factory and a lot of string pulling was required to get in. She'd put forms in before that and hadn't heard anything back. He agreed to give her an interview.

At the time they hadn't started making watches yet. They were making coils for aeroplanes at the factory. When they started making the watches Joyce went to work on Inspection on the test racks. This was on the Anglo site.

When Joyce went to the factory it was in its infancy, and when it opened they only employed a few at a time. Joyce says it was one of the Labour MPs who brought the factory to the area.

00.06.30: 'There was hardly anybody there when I went. We were in, it was known as the Assembly. It was all ... wooden flooring, beautiful there.'

They built a new, 'dust-proof' building, and they all moved in to that. The old assembly building became the servicing department where her sister worked. She later joined Joyce in the test rack area.

Everybody was trying to get into Tick Tock because there was no other work around. When they started making the wrist watches, especially the ladies' wrist watches, the components were very small.

Joyce remembers that when she started working there on the coils, she was working between two women.

'They showed me how to do them, and I was doing them well. After a couple of weeks, the linesman came on to me, the charge hand, and he said, how many of these can you do a day? And I said 144. Well, you're not booking that many in, he said. No, I'm giving them to Mary, and the other girl sitting next to me. They didn't tell me that if I sent in 144 I'd be getting bonus. And me, only young. They were in their twenties. They were having bonus at my expense.'

She was told to book them in herself from then on. He had come down one day and accused her of talking and it wasn't her. It was the pair either side of her who were talking, but she was the one having a row. They thought that she wasn't working but she was giving her tickets to the girls either side of her.

00.09.44: 'My first wage was one pound, two and six, with four pence insurance for stoppages.'

00.10.03: 'I thought I was rich.'

She gave her first wage packet to her mother but when she started earning about four pounds she would give her mother part of her wages only for board and lodgings.

Her mother would give her pocket money out of her wages when she first started earning money there – approximately five shillings – so she wasn't much better off financially than when she worked for her uncle. Her father wasn't earning very much money in the tin works.

00.11.12: Everybody was chuffed to get in [to Tick Tock] because there was nothing round here. It was either go scrubbing or something like that.'

She would never have considered going away to work. She wouldn't have had the confidence.

Joyce describes when she first started in the factory. She said,

00.11.57: 'To tell you the truth I was frightened to move from my seat, because I used to go to work, go to my bench and work until the bell went. Then I used to cycle up home to have my dinner and back. I never even went to the toilet there. When I did go to the toilet – I had to go one day – and Miss Taylor that was the cleaner there said, 'Just started love?' I said 'no'. I think I'd been there about two years and that was the first time I'd gone through. And you had to walk all the way from the Assembly then, and the automatics had started up, and all the boys on the machines you know, and when you were walking through they would be whistling and things like that, oh flip.'

Joyce never used to feel confident but became a bit more confident as time went on. When they moved up to the Test Racks, they built a new building at the back using glass blocks. There were no windows that could be opened as the building was supposed to be dust-proofed. They had to have special shoes for their feet, and overalls that wouldn't be taken out of the factory.

They were making about 3,000 watches a day (winding them and setting them). They could be wound by machine but had to be set by hand. They would be put on test for 24 hours. They would all be marked up the next day, to see how much they'd gained or how much they'd lost. They would then be wound and set again, and put on the next rack. The girl on the next rack would regulate them the next day. They had to go through seven racks altogether. The last one was the inspection rack (and then into packing.)

If there was no work on the test racks they would be sent somewhere else. They then started lip (?) lines. They had so many girls working on belts, and if there was somebody missing they would send for somebody from another department. They put Joyce on others on training so that they would be able to 'fill in the gaps' as required. Joyce didn't like doing this. Some lines men would award people like Joyce the bonus for keeping the line going, but others wouldn't give it and this meant losing money.

00.16.23: 'I remember going down one day, and I don't know where I got the cheek from that day. A manager was there and he said for me to go on this line and I said, 'I don't want to go on this line.' 'You've got to,' he said. 'I don't want to,' I said. It doesn't pay me the wage.'

But she did have to go.

Joyce says she shouldn't have left when she did, because she was only fifty five.

When Joyce started there it was the foremen or lines men who were responsible for training. Joyce remembers working on the levers which meant that you had to get so much space

between two little prongs. Joyce said, she would get them all right and then the foreman would come and rubbish them all, and she would have to do them again until they were right.

It was mainly women working at the factory apart from the lines men, foremen, and maintenance men. Joyce thinks at one time there were about 1,200 people working there.

When Joyce started at the factory the girls were local, but the foremen came down from London. The houses in Alda Avenue were built for the bosses. Once a certain number of girls had been trained up, they would then be responsible for training other girls.

The bosses were quite strict. The girls weren't supposed to move around. They would watch girls didn't spend more than ten minutes in the toilet. Joyce had one foreman who was very good, but one day when she came out of the toilets with some of the girls he was waiting for them as he considered that they had been in there too long.

Access to the Illumination Department was restricted. This is where they made the illuminated faces and hands. That was dangerous work because 'the illumination could affect you.'

It was noisy in the Automatics and in the Machine Shop but there was little noise where Joyce worked. She started work at half past seven in the morning, nevertheless when she first started working then she would start at six thirty, and also working on a Saturday morning, and working until about five at night. By the time she left she was only working thirty nine hours a week. (She remembers working forty eight hours a week when she first started there.) They had to work a Saturday, initially, but then they came down to a five day week. Later on, they came down to a four and a half day week, finishing at half past twelve on a Friday.

Joyce would travel to work on her bike. This would only take her about five minutes. She would go home for lunch and her father would tell her that she threw her lunch down. When she started courting she would be back in work by ten past one so that they could have a chat. He worked in Maintenance, as a fitter. They would have a chat in the morning before they started work, and at lunchtimes. If it was sunny they would sit out on the banks. He worked there for just under twenty five years, so he didn't receive his watch. He went up to work in Abercrave, making nuts and bolts. Before he left Tick Tock they offered to make him a foreman but he refused as he had already decided to go.

00.25.38: 'There had never been any works around here... never been anything for girls so everybody was glad of it. It was a sad day when it closed really.'

The building that Joyce worked in was knocked down. Tesco's is there now.

Joyce describes the working day – after starting work at seven thirty she would have a break at nine o'clock. She would have a cup of coffee, but they weren't allowed to eat.

She said, 'We used to sneak a biscuit, mind you.'

The dinner break was half an hour, and then she would work through.

00.26.50: ‘The only time you left your bench was to go to the toilet.’

The morning break would be at the bench. A trolley would come around at one time. Later one they had vending machines, but most people took a flask and would make their own.

When the “Enfield” started (the clocking making part of the factory) Joyce went over to train there in order to work on the swing shift which was half past four to half past nine. It was all new and there was competition between the day shift and the swing shift. The swing shift were hitting their targets, where as the day shift wasn’t resulting in friction, and they day shift wanted to get rid of them.

There were lots of young boys the same age as Joyce doing apprenticeships. Many relationships were formed at the factory, and when couples married it was put into the Tick Tock magazine.

They had a suggestion scheme there and Joyce’s husband made a suggestion for chroming the winders of the watches. He made a jig for them so that they could do so many at a time. He was presented with a cheque by the managing director of the factory for doing this. Many of the boys had their suggestions implemented.

Joyce’s husband had received an apprenticeship in the RAF and lived in Birmingham before he came to Tick Tock to work. He’d gone to Birmingham when he was about fourteen because there was no work in the Ystradgynlais area.

Workers had to clock in and were allowed to be three minutes late. However, if they were four minutes late they would be docked.

00.32.07: ‘If you were late on the lines you lost your job for the day.’

Joyce was never late for work.

Joyce remembers going into work one day when her husband was ill. She had taken a certificate in for him (to the Cae’r Bont factory) and then gone into work herself and realised when she was at her bench that she didn’t have her teeth in. She drove straight home at sixty miles an hour to get her teeth.

The work that she did was quite skilled because if the components had to be set just right. Joyce can’t remember anybody being sacked. It was mainly single girls working there when the factory started. There were loads of couple there. When women got pregnant they finished working, although this changed with time. Joyce worked until she was six months pregnant.

She worked there for fifteen years and then she had her daughters Cheryl and Lynne. She was off for nine years. Her husband came home one day and said they were looking for girls at the factory for a six week period. She stayed for seventeen years and considers herself lucky because her husband died when her daughters were teenagers and she needed the income.

It was mainly married women who worked on the swing shift. Joyce had gone to work on the day shift and only managed because of the help given to her by her sister and neighbour. The woman next door would come in every morning and give the girls their breakfast and get them off to school. Joyce tried to pay her and the neighbour refused to take any money.

Joyce describes the time when her husband went ill, and the extras that the job at the factory allowed them to have when they were both working, such as a holiday for the girls in America.

00.42.50:

Joyce remembers having a pay rise about every year. She said, ' **There was always a stink about pay rises, how much per cent you were going to have and all the rest of it. When you were on Inspection you had the same wage every week ...but when you were on piece work you'd have more, the more bonus you did the more money you'd have. '**

The workers could have a discount on so many watches and a clock each year.

Joyce remembers sitting outside with her husband, Bill, and other workers enjoying the sunshine one summers day when she was hit by a piece of steel that one of the boys had thrown. Her husband was furious. He was a member of the Union and went up to the office to complain. She had stitches in her face up at the surgery. She also suffered a black eye. Joyce didn't find out until years later who'd done it.

Joyce's husband was a shop steward in the AEU (?), and was also a convener for a while. She remembers there was a strike at the factory but can't remember the reason for it. On the whole, Joyce thinks that the women were treated fairly. Her husband never used to say anything to her about the work of the union.

They had to wear white overalls and rubber shoes in the factory. In the morning the cloak room would be stinking with the smell from the rubber shoes. Some of the boys would have brown overalls. After a while the girls were allowed to take their own shoes in.

The rules and regulations were quite strict. They had to wear the uniform and special shoes to be worn inside the factory only. There was a time keeper there who had his office next to the place where the workers clocked in and out. After everybody had clocked in he would collect all the cards and mark down who was absent and who was in. Anybody who was absent would have to go to Personnel the next day and fetch their card, and explain why they were absent the previous day.

When Joyce's mother was in hospital visiting was restricted to Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Joyce wanted to go down on Wednesday because her mother had had an operation. She was refused a pass from work by the foreman to go the hospital so she went to Personnel, who also refused her. She went, regardless of their refusal to grant her permission but was not sacked, she thinks because she had a good record.

The factory had to be a certain temperature, and was warm. It was also well lit to facilitate the work. The windows didn't open in order to keep out the dust and it did get hot in the summer. The wall was made up of glass blocks.

In the clock room there was a basket for putting your shoes, and then they would hang their coats up on a hanger. There were wash rooms in the toilets and the woman in charge was very strict. If they were in the toilet for too long she would be knocking on the door.

00.54.55: 'She was really strict. She was for the management.'

00.55.14: 'You could see the ones getting ... close up to the management, the linesmen, because we wanted over time at the weekend. Certain ones were asked and others weren't asked. '

Joyce doesn't remember music being played while they worked but remembers some of the boys asking her to sing a song. She knew all the pop songs then.

Smokers weren't allowed to smoke on the line, and would go to the toilet, although sometimes they weren't allowed to smoke there. If Miss Taylor was there, she'd tell them not to. It would annoy Joyce that the girls would go to the toilet to smoke because if somebody wanted to get into a cubicle to go to the toilet they had to wait.

Joyce thinks that her back may have suffered long term damage through sitting on her swivel chair at the factory. The three discs on her back were permanently bruised all the time that she was there and she does suffer with her back now.

When Joyce first got married they couldn't afford a house and stayed in rooms (in her parents' house). They then went to stay with her husband's grandmother following the death of her husband. Joyce hated living there in Ystalyfera and came back to live with her parents. It took Joyce and her husband quite some time to get enough money together to get a place of their own. They were married six years before they had a house.

Joyce enjoyed working on the swing shift but missed her husband in the evenings, and he would then look after the children while she was at work. Joyce thinks it was better when they were working days together.

The rate for overtime was higher than the normal rate. They paid time and a half on a Saturday, and double time on a Sunday, and every body was after the overtime.

Joyce says about the doling out of over time.

01.01.38: 'They had their favourites .. and it all depended on what you could do. If you could do a number of jobs you got a better chance.'

Joyce didn't go to the canteen to eat. She went home to her parents in the early days, and Bill's aunt used to run the Woodlands café, and his mother used to work there so Joyce and Bill would go up there and take their food upstairs.

01.02.44: ‘When we first started we were having holidays but weren’t getting paid... When it came that we were having pay, I thought it was marvellous- a week’s pay.’

This week would be in the summer during the colliers’ holidays, so all the workers were off at the same time. Later on they used to have two days off at Whitsun, Boxing Day and Christmas Day, two days off at Easter and then the summer holiday, which was a week originally and then increased to a fortnight. Some of the girls who worked together used to go on holiday together. There was also a factory trip – trips to Porthcawl and Barry, Weston-super-mare. They used to be on a Saturday. The trips fizzled out after a while, probably due to the fact that people started buying their own cars. When Joyce started at the factory nobody had a car. There were only bike stands and there was no car park. Joyce and Bill got a van themselves, and then everybody started getting cars, and it was a nightmare to try and get out of there at night. They were all racing to the car park to get out first.

When they went on the trips, they went by bus (and by boat to Weston-super-mare) of course. They went to Barry, Porthcawl, or went to Swansea once a year, usually at Easter time in order to have something new for church. It was the social factory within the factory that used to organize it. They used to pay so much a week for that, approximately 5p, and that would come out of their wages.

01.07.00:

When Joyce got married in 1951 (the factory opened in 1946 or 1947), her colleagues gave her a clock (from Enfield). That clock was one of the first clocks made at the newly started Enfield. The clock stopped working and Joyce threw it out although Joyce’s sister’s clock still worked.

Joyce and her sister worked in the same department. Joyce was on testing watches and her sister was on packing. When people were required in packing Joyce used to go in to help out.

Joyce has photos of her daughter at the factory dressed up as Andy Pandy for an occasion at the social club. Joyce’s daughter worked in the Personnel Department.

Joyce didn’t like Christmas time at the factory because everybody used to get drunk. They used to go out to the pub at dinner time and bring drink in.

01.10.21: ‘You had some real wicked one there, they’d get away with murder.’

There was no work done there on the last day before Christmas. They would decorate the canteen but not the factory.

01.10.52: ‘When it first started, we used to have lovely dances there. We had Joe Ross and all down, playing there ... in the canteen. Well, that’s where Bill and I started going out because, we started having dancing classes. Well, I couldn’t dance’.

The dancing classes were in the canteen in the evenings, after work. Bill started going and she had to dance with him because she couldn’t follow anybody else.

The management or the ‘social’ arranged the dancing classes.

They used to have visitors round to take a look at what they were doing, including MPs. They would come to talk and ask them what they were doing.

00.12.43: ‘We used to try and hide. We didn’t want to answer them’.

Joyce never felt bored with the work.

01.13.03: ‘I suppose you did get fed up sometimes, but it was a job and if you wanted money you had to work.’

Joyce left the first time because she was pregnant.

01.13.23: ‘I was upset. I didn’t want to leave. But I wanted a baby and we’d been married for so long we didn’t think we were going to have any.’

She had no intentions of going back but her husband informed her that they needed girls in for a rush job.

Joyce describes the time she left for good as ‘a con’. The factory told her that there was a good deal coming up which meant that she would have eighty pounds a week until she was sixty years old. (She was fifty five at the time.) After that she would receive her pension.

She was ready to take the deal because of the youngsters coming in to work there, and the language they were using. Also, all of her friends were leaving but they had husbands who were working. She decided to leave and everything went fine until she got to sixty. But when she got to sixty and received her money from Lucas, they sent her seventeen pounds a month pension. Her daughter rang the head office of Lucas (who had taken over from Smith’s) who insisted it was right. She then rang the National Insurance people, and they said that by law they had to pay her twelve pounds and eighteen pence a week, and this is what she then received. But she would have been better off if she’d carried on working. During her retirement she looked after her daughters’ children.

Joyce describes a generational change in attitudes to the new workers coming in.

01.16.15: ‘In the Anglo .. they were strict. You didn’t walk around and things like that. You were sitting at your bench and you worked. On the lines in the Enfield they’d get up and walk around. They’d have somebody to sit in for them, you’ve got to have somebody to sit in for you if you’re going to the toilet... Their attitude to the linesmen and that. They are in charge of you aren’t they? And there was no respect there or anything.’

She went back in 1970 and it was alright at the beginning but it gradually got worse and worse. She didn’t have a leaving party when she left. She didn’t like going to the events as she doesn’t drink.

When she was looking after her grandchildren she spent all her time ferrying children (her own grandchildren and other children).

She is still in contact with one of her friends that worked at the factory and they see each other regularly. She is in contact with another friend who contacts her by phone.

01.20.04: Joyce describes her photographs

Joyce's sister went to the children's Christmas party in Tic Toc.