

The Workers Story – Interviewee Form

Name: Joyce Holloway

Number: WS08

DOB: 1923

Age at interview: 84

Dates at Royal Worcester: 1937 to 1955

Key areas: Enamelling, Stencilling, Welwyn during the war

Date of interview: 07.03.07

Interview Summary

Joyce started at RW in 1937 at the age of 14 as an apprentice in the enamellers' department, where she worked until the outbreak of war. When she was 18, she was transferred to 'The Welwyn', a small factory within RW making radiolocation tubes for radar. She loved the work and made many friends, some of whom she's still in touch with. At the end of the war, she went into china decorating and then to stencilling. She met her husband Jack Holloway at RW -he was the foreman of the aerographers' department. She left in 1955 to have her first baby.

Interview Synopsis (per 5 minute tracks):

CD 1 Track 1 to 18

1. (0.00) Ident Joyce Holloway (nee Rouse) (JH) interviewed by Julia Letts (JL)
2. (0.13) Joyce attended Stanley Road School and left aged 14. Sister was already a caster at RW. Having won a small scholarship at school for art, she decided to apply for a job in the Decorating Department and got a job in enamellers, starting pre Christmas 1937 (JH corrects herself). Very apprehensive on the first day as she didn't know her way around. Worked at top of an old building overlooking the yard. Foremistress was Miss Ivy Bloodworth who was very interesting and clever. Given a chair opposite a stack of plates and cups and given fat oil, brushes etc. and shown how to mix colours. Given white plates and practiced painting fine lines, roses and Forget-me-not petals for several weeks. Hours were from 8.00 till 5.30 Monday to Friday and 8.00 till 12.00 on Saturdays. There were long tables down each side of the room with at least 12 girls working (JH lists them).
3. (5.13) Large table down the centre of the room where finished work was placed ready for the carriers to take down to the kiln. Describes how they did this – long wooden plank perched on their heads, down all the stairs to the kiln, never dropped anything. On Saturday mornings the juniors had to wash everything down including central heating pipes and floors to lay the dust. JH didn't mind as a change from the rest of the work. When orders were scarce during the Depression, and because if you were under 16 you couldn't claim the dole, workers were retained and little jobs were found for them. Harry Davis gave painting lessons to girls to fill in the time. Older workers had 3 days on and 3 days off (and could claim the dole when not working). Names the girls; Mona Mcargue, Marie Lloyd, Grace Bradley, Margaret Holmes and Miss Whitely who was a very good painter specializing in flower painting was so tiny that her chair had to be put on blocks.

4. (10.14) Describes the work – flower painting, filling in of flowers, enamelling (a different technique). All work was shared out if there was a large order and had to match a standard even though done by different girls. You copied patterns kept in the Pattern room. Joyce disliked doing the ‘Grecian key’ pattern (see pic) and found it very tedious and trying and didn’t welcome it. She preferred freehand, flowers etc. Patterns were printed and you filled in. Pay was 9s 6d a week. Progressed to piece work which was a big incentive, and although boys were paid more this was never questioned. Kitty Blake was there when Joyce started. More on Harry Davis who was very patient when teaching the painting classes which lasted about two hours.

5. (15.12) Showed her how to construct flowers eg tulips. He lived in Wylde’s Lane and as Joyce lived in Fort Hill they often walked to work together. He was very sympathetic when her brother was fighting in the Palestinian War as his son had been in a Japanese POW camp in World War Two. Told how he had visited the Queen when he was working on the model of her on her horse. Joyce remembered the Stinton brothers, one of whom was lame. (17.14) Description of factory buildings. She was in a tall building, several floors, different things going on on different floors, wooden floors, metal steps spiralling up. There was a canteen (the institute) across the road and a very nice café for visitors using blue dragon china, but workers couldn’t go there. (18.37) When the War started she wanted to leave and help the War effort. Mr Gimson persuaded her to stay and work in the Tube Room on Welwyn. JH wasn’t keen. Tales of dust and horrid dipping liquid used on ceramic tubes. They wore white coats and hats and had to drink ½ pint of milk each morning in the canteen and each month the Works doctor would examine their eyes and nails for signs of lead poisoning.

6. (20.21) Explains that the Welwyn had already been set up and others were already working there. Over 18s had to do war work or go into services. Her best friend in the enamellers Norah Benbow was exempt from War work as she had a scar on her lungs. Joyce’s sister (in the casting) had a bad foot so joined a Voluntary Red Cross detachment (under works nurse Nan Ayers). Story about Nan Ayers nursing Dyson Perrins through a long illness. JH didn’t know anyone in Welwyn, but at 18, she started there. JH thinks that production continued in rest of the factory. Says the ‘show room’ (former café now Henry Sandon Hall) was the grinding room. Marion Avery worked in there. JH arrived through same door as normal, then along a long corridor to the end.

7. (25.13) Tries to recall where the Welwyn was and how many rooms Welwyn rooms (dipping room, grinding room, winding room, the stores and the fettling room, little office and Mr Cypulls (sp?) office). JH was able to visit her old friends in the factory. JH on dipping under Violet Brook, then JH was recommended to Doctor Bronowski and moved to work in the Tube Room and painting lines on tubes which were thought to be used as radar equipment. Then JH moved to storeroom with Kath Harbour, a very nice woman. Very cold room heated only with an electric fire. They illegally put a kettle on the

bars to make tea. It was a store for wires of different strengths (ohms). Some as fine as human hair.

8. (30.23) Their job was to measure wire, as it went to winding room, under Win Pearce from the gilders (very clever at repairing nylons by crocheting the ladders.) The tubes came from Steatite at Stourport (from 2cm to 30cm). Explains processes. Tubes were fired before being dipped in a pale green liquid which turned dark green. They were then checked and wires were embedded in them in the winding room, and then sprayers would re-spray over the wires again.
9. (35.21) They were then checked by two blind ladies, Eva and Rose, who would examine even the smallest tubes by touch. Story of one of them untangling wool. Tubes then collected by men with a van. JH never wondered what they were for (resistors of some sort). Joyce felt it was a worthwhile job. "I was very happy there and made a good many friends". Mentions friend Mary Hill. Recalls plane that dropped bombs on MECO. Story about one of the girls falling out with foremistress Ivy Bloodworth. Said she hoped that Ivy's windows would be blown out, and they were. Fortunately Ivy's house was spared! The girl was mortified.
10. (40.13) JH doesn't think RW had a shelter. There was an air raid warning system in Worcester.
11. (41.23) More wartime experiences. Christmas on the Welwyn – making paper chains from coloured requisition forms. JH was one of ten children and they coped well with rationing. 43.22 The one day strike in the Welwyn. About this time, Edith Cox was the Union Secretary ("she didn't look like a strike leader she was very ladylike"). She thought they were undervalued and called a one day strike. More details on this. It resulted in a monthly bonus amounting to about an extra £4.0s 0d. 45.30 More on Dr Bronowski. Refugee working at the factory. Short, dark, smart, kind. He was a ceramic chemist. Spoke good English.
12. (46.25) Role was to oversee the chemical side of the production and set up the system. He came and went. Mr Cypulls was drafted from the casting side of RW. He was very handsome. JH in Welwyn from 1941 to end of war (in the stores) At end of war Welwyn moved to Blythe in Northumberland. Win Pearce (head of winding) and Marion Avery went to Northumberland to teach girls how to do the work. JH and Kath left to do all the clearing, sorting, and packing of left-over tubes to Steatite. Bitterly cold. "Hunched over our little electric fire." (50.50) Welwyn work hours were long, 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m, short break at 4pm where they went to café in Sidbury and had bread and dripping.
13. (51.23) On Friday night they went to dances at the Guildhall. Some girls went to dances with American G.Is who were stationed nearby. Coaches came and collected the girls. JH helped do their hair. In winding room they had turbans over their rollers all day. (53.47) Talks of particular characters including the White Lady of Worcester (dressed all in white including hat and parasol), a

well-known character, used to promenade up and down the High Street at weekends. She turned up to work in the Dipping Department to everyone's dismay (Miss Wood).

14. (56.20 short track) Another lady who came to work there was a Polish refugee.
15. (57.14) JH didn't want to go back to decorating after the War. Win Pearce (from winding room) asked her to join ladies' section of gilding which was set up in the men's gilding room. Reduced wages. She and Marion Avery joined Win, and they all got on well with the men. Mentions Ivor Williams, Mr Phipps (cellist), Bill Ashley. Two brothers, Harry and Percy. Also 3 experienced lady gilders, Irene Hartland, Marie Wainwright and Miss Mcglathlyn (sp?). after 12 months, JH asked to go into stencilling in the 'Ground Layers'.
16. (1.02.14) Describes what they did – background colour on the plates (solid band of colour around edge, it's dabbed on, not painted. A thin varnish is put on and then powder paint dabbed over it). If there is a pattern in the band, the stenciller paints the printed pattern on in glucose solution. This job was in a different room but same building as before. The room had a glass roof – scorching hot in summer and cold in winter. Partition across and aerographers on other side. She met Jack Holloway.
17. (1.07.02) How they met (through another girl). This was about 1951. In 1949 Joyce's mother died, and Mr Gimson allowed her to work part time in order to care for her brother and sister who were still at school, her father and grandfather (no part-timers at RW but her foreman interceded). In 1952 Jack became ill and had a malignant tumour wrapped around his spine. Operated on at the John Radcliffe in Oxford. He recovered and in June 1953 they married. They lived in rooms in London Road. JH's routine; went to family home in morning, as still caring for her family, and working in the afternoons when she was expecting her first child which she continued to do for seven months.
18. (1.12.20) Still enjoyed work. Nan Ayers the nurse kept an eye on her. Her sister started to work in the Figurine Painting department when she was 15. Jack became Foreman of the Ground Layers. Did you miss work? "Terribly". Mentions Dot Hallet who worked on the Welwyn. The War years were hard but she enjoyed her work. Mentions queuing for anything going in the war. 1.15.48 Joyce remembers meeting the Queen who watched her gilding "She was beautiful and had the most lovely complexion" and the Bi-Centenary Dinner in the Guildhall provided by Mr Dyson Perrins. There were coaches in Deansway to take workers to a dance at Malvern Winter Gardens at which Ted Heath and his band played.
19. (1.17.26) Describes the dance. Story about Pat Martin (now Wurmlli) formed a drama group. Put on little plays in the canteen in the evenings. Very well received. A man from the ground layers called John Raimont sang in the plays. He had a fine baritone voice. He later went to the States.

20. (1.20.57) **Jack Holloway takes over.** Jack was an aerographer. Started after the War as a Ground Layer. Process described. Spraying paint on to figurines. Worked with two ladies that he names. Very fine work. Enjoyed it. Once met Air Vice Marshall Tedder who watched him work. Did historical figures mainly. Names Henry VIII, Edward III, Anne Boleyn, Princess Elizabeth on Tommy. Set of Burmese Temple Dancers. Hardest part was holding the figurine... they were very heavy. Made Princess Anne's wedding present, a jardinière of flowers. He coloured about 51 flowers. Paints mixed in a machine and sieved.

21. (1.21.01) Jack came and went several times and finally left in 1987. Worked with Harry Stinton on cups and saucers (story about the 4-eyed cow), says Harry Stinton was very skilled and kept the place 'spotless'. Most proud of Burmese Temple Dancers of which he did the whole series. Learnt from Mr Beechey. Used to take snuff which would get in the paint.