

The Workers Story – Interviewee Form

Name: Paintresses

Number: WS22

DOB: Various

Age at interview:

Dates at Royal Worcester: Variously between 1946 and 1986

Key areas: Painting

Date of interview: 04.06.07

Note: This is a group interview recorded in an echoey room. The ladies speak over each other at times.

Interview Summary:

Maureen Smallman, Lorraine Smith, Joyce Lawrence, Fay Stephens, Marion Charlcroft, Cynthia Smith and Freda Griffiths were all friends at RW, and still meet regularly on the first Monday of the month to reminisce about their time at the factory. Freda was the first to start, in 1946, aged 14. She became head of the department in 1966 and left in 1971. Fay joined in 1949 at 15. She later worked from home when her daughters were young, and then came back part-time until 1986. Cynthia joined next, in 1953. She also came straight from school on the recommendation of her art teacher. She later became a home worker too. Marion and Joyce were friends at Stanley Rd school and started on the same day at RW in 1956. To start with they came to work in their school skirts and ankle socks. Maureen started later in the same year. Her sister (Joyce Holloway WS08) and brother-in-law (Jack Holloway) already worked at RW. Lorraine was the last to start in about 1957 – she wanted to paint or be a nurse, and managed to do both as she became part of the Red Cross team at RW.

Interview Synopsis (per 5 minute track)

Tracks 1 to 17

1. (0.00) Ident
2. (0.26) Freda Griffiths (nee Jones) started in 1946 aged 14 after working in service for 6 months. She was interviewed by Miss Rea and the Personnel Manager and started the following Monday. First impressions - ‘gob smacked!’ She had to run from the bus stop to get in by 9am. She was escorted to the department, given her tools and off she went. If you needed any more brushes, you had to buy them. First week was spent learning to put flesh colour on.
3. (3.29) Says the factory was draconian, dark and dingy. Remembers the bottle neck kilns belching out smoke. You couldn’t see through the windows of their department. There was a lift at the far end. Tells the story of someone stealing an umbrella and hiding it in the lift. It got caught on the first shelf, which tipped on to the next and next, smashing all the porcelain in the lift. Also remembers the fire-watch ladder going up onto the roof from the war years. The wooden floorboards used to get full of hair (from girls putting their rollers in) and the apprentices had to pick this out! Fay Stephens (nee Yarnold)

started next in 1949 – she had a letter from her headmistress saying she was good at art. Recalls her first day – mixing colours. It should take 20 mins to get rid of the gritty bits. The paints were metallic oxides which you had to mix with fat oil.

4. (8.27) They had a tier of plates with a cup at the top. Every night they poured the turps into the cup, and it would run from plate to plate and congeal on the bottom one. You then had a tile, and put your paint and oil on the tile – if it was too thick you added aniseed oil, if too thin you added glycerine. But Miss Rea would spit in it so the girls followed her example! To raise colour, you used more turps. Daisy Rea watched you all the time and corrected the girls' positions. They remember Miss Rea coming around with sponges to cool them down. Cynthia Smith (nee Beddington) started next in 1953, straight from school.
5. (13.28) Remembers her first day as she wore her school skirt and white blouse and she felt very conspicuous. Girls didn't wear overalls. Mentions the smell. Joyce says her mum wouldn't let her in the house until she'd changed. Fay used to get blisters from sucking her brush, which she did to take the 'light' out of the model's eyes. She also got turps rash on her thumbs. Cynthia recalls that there were about 30 when she started, there were rows of tables, with 2 opposite each other. (She was on her own to start with). Remembers about 6 of them going to the Theatre Royal, and the whisper going round 'who's got aniseed balls?!'. Later she became an 'out worker' and didn't want the smell in her house. By then they'd changed the aniseed to lavender oil.
6. (18.28) She set up in her box bedroom. Mr Mann from the warehouse used to bring the figures over in the boot of his car, which was fine until he had an accident. Marion and Joyce started together in 1955, they'd been at Stanley Rd school together, and both decided in the playground to go to RW and get a job so they did. Marion says she was very shy and Joyce did all the talking. In their first week, all Joyce did was 'grind' paint. Then they moved on to 'fern leaves' jugs. Marion also recalls their training plates. Fay says they did night school, and Wed pm at the Victoria Institute, where they also learned to make models.
7. (23.29) Maureen Smallman (nee Rowse) started in 1956, a term later. She came because her sister (Joyce Holloway) worked at the factory. Her brother in law (Jack Holloway) met her at the gate and showed her how to clock in. She remembers the heat, smell and hugeness of the place. She had an accident, tripping on the stairs down from the Colour Room and dropping an acid bottle on her legs. She was seen by Nurse Ayers who 'washed' the burn with a lime mixture, and she was taken to hospital. Her stockings were shredded. The acid bottle was inside a sand box. Lorraine was the last to start, in 1957, she wanted to paint or nurse and ended up doing both as she joined the RW Red Cross team.
8. (28.32) Lorraine lived in the country and came in on the bus. Her twin sister also started with her, in Mrs Pearson's room doing tea sets and plates. Below

the paintresses room, was the gilders and burnishers. Fay says that Lorraine, as a Red Cross volunteer, was called to her house when she was in labour.

9. (31.00) Marion's first figure was 'Only Me' which had lots of stitching around the dress. You had to collect the pattern from a glass case and copy it. Flesh was done first, which she found the hardest bit. Then they did all the 'base colour', before the first firing. They initialled their own figures. The figures were 'passed' by Daisy and then put on a wooden pallet. This was taken to the kiln when there was a space, and returned the next day for the second layer – 'depth and detail'. Fay's first figure was 'Tuesday's Child' which she bought for 2 shillings. Joyce's was 'Mischief'. She says that if you wanted to keep something you'd bang it on the desk to crack it, and you could then buy it back. Freda admits that lots of people were collecting the whole series of Days of the Week, and when Daisy was out of the room, they used to 'crack' any they needed for the collection so they could buy them for a shilling!
10. (35.12) Marion says that Daisy was strict – you had to put your hand up to go to the toilet, and you weren't allowed to talk. When she left the room, they all started chatting. One of the jobs of the apprentice painters was to get the tea for John Lance. Cynthia says that if you did his tea near Christmas he'd give you a present of a pair of nylons. Freda relates the story of Mr Lance catching one of the girls with a pet rabbit under her desk. Fay talks about Yvonne, who was deaf and dumb. The rest of the girls learned to do sign language. Yvonne was once taking the Mickey out of Miss Rea when Daisy walked back in the room. Yvonne used to call her 'Misery'. Joyce talks about visitors coming around.
11. (40.12) She remembers the American women getting really close to you, and that they stank of perfume. Marion says that they met lots of VIPs, including anyone performing at the Odeon etc. Joyce tells the story of David King and his white limousine. Fay was in love with David Whitfield, and couldn't believe it when he walked in. The girls were allowed to have one picture up in their areas. Most of the intrigue and discussion went on in the ladies' toilets. Some girls came in with their rollers in under a scarf. Back to painting... Freda explains that they did figurines, ashtrays and smaller birds. They weren't allowed to mix with the men painters.
12. (45.12) Cynthia moved to the men painters department in the eighties. Fay worked from home while her girls were small, but often didn't have anything to hand in. Eventually she went back 'on my terms'; 9am to 3pm so she could meet the children from school. She then started doing Limited Editions. They all mention their favourites. The Swiss Papal Guard prompts a discussion. Freda says the easiest colour was yellow and the hardest were the pinks.
13. (50.12) Freda and Cynthia talk more about the different paints. They all hated doing 'the brown monks'. They all loved doing the birds... British garden birds and some American ones. Freda talks about piecework, and how she could save time by doing six at a time. Marion says she was slow and couldn't earn more than her apprentice rate (£2, 6 shillings). If they complained about the piecework rate, they'd have a visit from 'Time and Study'.

14. (55.12) They'd send a man to time you, which made you work faster than you wanted to. Freda says later she went on a course and witnessed how you could speed up and make savings if you worked more efficiently. Joyce mentions the Lump room – she'd buy things for an aunt who had a shop and would buy any white ware off her. They discuss their salaries and that they had to give a proportion back to their mums. Joyce says on the day she left she told Mr Lance that you couldn't have the 2 Q's, both quality and quantity.
15. (1.00.12) Most of them left because the wages were so low. They could get more money working in a shop. Maureen says at one point they went on short term, and she was moved into the aerographers. She was an aerograph cleaner, taking the excess paint off after spraying. Aerographing was coming in... for example, 'Grandmother's Dress', which was originally done by hand, was later done by spray. Later RW brought in lithographed eyes. Before this, Freda could pick out a girl's work by the model's faces. Pat Rigby did the most beautiful faces. Also Jean Smith. Freda says the introduction of Standard Minute Values was the start of RW's downfall. She explains how the system worked.
16. (1.05.12) Continues to talk about Standard Minute Values.. you got a grade based on how much you could do in a certain length of time. Freda tended to do the first models, and worked with Freda Doughty. She'd try not to rush, because they 'priced' it on her. Cynthia did the sample for 'Wednesday's Child' in several different colours, when they brought out the second series of Days of the Week. Freda mentions a model she had signed by Freda Doughty – unfortunately she scrubbed the signature off. Marion remembers Freda bringing in live kittens when she was doing kitten models.
17. (1.10.18) Also Freda's models had long feet because she did. Freda Griffiths was offered the chance to be an apprentice to Freda Doughty, and spend 2 years with her in Cornwall learning the techniques. She turned it down because she wanted to get married.