

The Workers Story – Interviewee Form

Name: Welwyn Ladies

Number: WS29

DOB:

Myrtle 7.11.20

Dorothy 26.1.25

Joyce 1923

Age at interview:

Dates at Royal Worcester: All between 1937 and 1955

Key areas: Welwyn

Date of interview: 13.07.07

Interview Summary:

Joyce, Myrtle and Dorothy all worked together and became friends during the war, when they were in 'The Welwyn', a factory within the Royal Worcester factory, making ceramic tubes (used as resistors, some in radar equipment). They all vividly remember the work, the noise, the Polish supervisor Mr Boronowski, health checks and dances in the canteen, and making Christmas decorations.

Interview Synopsis (per 5 minute track)

Tracks 1 to 12

1. (0.00) Ident

2. (0.19) Dorothy (Parker, later Hallett) talks about her first job when she left school at 14 (easter 1939). She then moved to Russell and Dorrells but after 2 years was told she had to do war work. Her choices were railway, the Porcelain or metal castings. She chose the porcelain, but says she never enjoyed it. She was an inspector in Welwyn. She'd check the tubes under a light to see if any wire was showing. If so, they'd be sent back to be re-dipped and fired again. "it all seemed so secret, no body seemed to know what they were for". Describes a big room, that was very hot and dusty. **Myrtle** (Bellamy, later Gill) – says she was called up, and sent to the Porcelain by the Labour Exchange. Started in litho "doing the patterns" – she loved it. Remembers being fascinated by the old books in the pattern room.

3. (5.18) This was about 1939. She stayed there about a year and then moved to the Welwyn... thought at first that she wouldn't like it. First met Joyce Holloway there. Also remembers the dust, and the noise (very different to litho which was very quiet). Mr Sypols was the foreman. Myrtle refused to go in the 'grinders' because of the noise. She started as a 'sprayer' but without a mask or overall, spraying tubes of all different sizes on a tray. (Rustling of photos). Used spray guns. Before they started work, they had to drink milk (compulsory, but they never thought twice about it). Also had check ups once a month.

4. (10.21) They mention a friend who was taken ill. How did you get through the day? Dorothy remembers the clock and constantly looking at it. They mention listening to 'Workers Playtime' on the tannoy. They recall the noise, particularly the colour

machine, which had big stones put in it to grind the colour. Also recall the smell. Myrtle says the 'brass hats' came round (top military etc) and they realised they were doing important work. Talk about the man in charge, a polish man Dr Boronowski Myrtle would exchange music with him. He and Mr Sypols were the only men present, a part from delivery men who'd take the tubes to Welwyn Garden City. They calculate the number of girls (about 5 in stores, 6 in inspection,

5... (15.21) about 12 in the grinders, many more in the winders). Myrtle took the tubes away to the kilns. The tubes came from Steatite, then they were washed, then they went to the grinders for a groove to be cut in top and bottom. Then they were dipped in a thin layer of ceramic powder, then they went to the winding room. Joyce in 'stores' had to issue the wire, which ranged from as thin as a human hair, to quite thick. After the grinders, the tubes were dipped again, then taken by Myrtle on her tea trolley to the lift to go to the kiln. The kiln man was Sam Wild. Discussion about the kilns – Joyce reckons it was the electric kiln not the bottle kiln. Myrtle and her assistant Edna manned the 'tea trolley' down the slight slope in the corridor. Finally the tubes came back to Dorothy in inspection.

6. (20.21) Joyce was given a special job, because she'd been a painter. She sat on her own, and she had to put an adhesive strip on the wires, then paint over it, then the strip would be removed, leaving the wires exposed. Dr Boronowski told her that this was for radar. At 12.30 the hooter went for the hour lunch break. Joyce went home, Dorothy biked home to Barborne to let her dog out, Myrtle went to the canteen or to the YWCA café. Then raced back, and worked to 5.30. Myrtle would also have a meal before catching the train home to Eckington. Remembers waiting in the waiting room by the tiny fire, knitting. Discuss the wages. Joyce thought it was OK, especially when they got a bonus after their 'strike'.

7. (25.22) Sometimes they had to work till 8pm. Talk about the 'strike' again. The ladies comment "We thought we were very brave" "We were ashamed of ourselves". It seems to have been over wages, as the 'London' workers (Welwyn Garden?) were paid more. Edith Cox was their Union Rep, so they downed tools for a couple of hours, before being 'shamed' into going back to work by a man from Welwyn Garden. Myrtle remembers having to do 'firewatch' on a Sunday at the factory. They stayed in a room with beds in. Then went up a ladder on to the roof, and had a bucket of water and a stirrup pump. They were paid 3 and 6 pence for it. Myrtle's mum disapproved as she had to work on a Sunday.

8. (30.20) There were between 6 and 12 of them each evening, and they had to wear trousers because they were climbing ladders. Myrtle remembers an air raid shelter on the yard, and how she shared a grapefruit there with a lad. Joyce remembers a demonstration of what to do, but no practises. Dorothy recalls Nan Ayers, the nurse, and feeling ill one morning. Nurse Ayers diagnosed appendicitis, and had her in hospital in Castle Street immediately. Miss Ayers visited her after the op. Before Nurse Ayers, Joyce says you visited the lodgeman if you were ill. When she was an enameller, there was a girl called Libby Griffiths who had a heart complaint. If she collapsed, Joyce would have to run to the lodge to get her medicine. She'd be given it and they'd all wait to see if she'd come round.

9. (35.21) Myrtle's husband died in Burma when she was at Royal Worcester. He died in Dec but she didn't find out till April. She didn't take any time off. She says she was so young, he'd been away so long, and she had no body to bury. She married again in 1946, while still at the Porcelain. Joyce also recalls this time. Myrtle eventually went back to the litho department when the Welwyn finished in 1945. They had a day off while the machinery was stripped out. Dorothy had left by then, as she'd married in 1944 and had a son in 1945. "I gave three bleemin' big cheers when I walked out of that place!"

10. (40.21) Joyce talks about Myrtle's long days, and the terrible winters/ weather, especially 1947. Myrtle used to stay with Ronny Blake, and slept on 2 'easy' chairs in the sitting room. All agree that they had a shared experience in a community, and made great friends. Chat about how long they've been friends. Joyce recalls works dances, but Myrtle could never stay as she had to catch the train. Joyce was joint secretary of the social club. Had dances on a Friday night and whist drives.

11. (45.19) (Very short track – Joyce gets out the photos)

12. (45.23) Christmas in the department. Joyce remembers making make-shift decorations from discarded invoice papers (pink and green). Also made things out of silver paper and shiny plastic paper. They had a Christmas and Boxing Day off, but worked Christmas Eve and brought in any food they had - Joyce made a sponge cake out of dried egg from America. Memories of the Chamberlain Tea Rooms – they all remember the Dragon pattern cup and saucers. They were never allowed inside. It wasn't open during the war, but reopened for visitors after the war. Discusses where 'Welwyn' was... the old museum became the grinders.