

3Rd December 2008 at the home of Kenvin Newing in Mould

Kenvin can you take me back to the beginning of your life? When were you born, where, your parents & family and so on?

I was born in Norwood in Maes – Y –Dre.

When?

19 -8 – 23

And your parents

Henry Jones Sarah Jones

What did they do?

My dad was a plumber my mother was a cook in gentleman's service.

Where was she in service?

At one time she worked for Lord Haliburton in Oswestry.

So did you go to school at the age of five and where did you go?

I went to the National school in Mould in King street.

And did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes I had two brothers but I had a sister older than me. A few years older than me not very much and she died when she was 0 months old.

What were the differences in age between you and your two brothers?

My eldest brother was fourteen years older than me and my second brother was seven years older than me. My sister that died she was five years older than me.

So you were spoiled?

Yes I was "laughs"

I guess you had a pretty good time with two boys in the family and your father.

Yes right and my two cousins were two boys in on family and two in the other family so I was really spoilt. I was the only girl.

So you went to school at five did you stay at the same school for all your education?

Yes when you were seven you went to I think a standard one, the same department but higher class.

So it was all in the same school?

Yes in the same school.

Until you were?

Until I was fourteen I left school

In 1937

Yes I tried scholarship, I was in the scholarship class but I had St Vitus Dance. You don't hear about it now they must call it another name.

I think it was caused by a virus, and they sorted out what the virus was.

Oh yes.

So you left school in 1937, where did you go to work?

Well I went into service for just a while just to get used to it, but I didn't stay long. My mother brought me from there.

So where did you go into service?

Only in a house up the lane, not far from us. The lady that took me to work there she had been the "totten"(unclear) queen of Great Britain. She wanted me to go down to Cornwall to live but my mother said no so I did not go then. I went to Courtaulds but I did not like the work there.

In Flint?

Yes, I stayed there till I must have been seventeen or eighteen. Then I went to Rhydymwyn to work.

When you were in service did you live in?

No oh no I just used to go every morning.

What time in the morning?

It would be for about nine o'clock it wasn't very early.

So you finished about tea time?

When I had finished my work I could come home. It was an ordinary house really.

And how much did you get paid?

I think it was about four or five shillings.

For the week?

Yes that's right.

So you went down to Courtaulds in Flint? How did you get the job there? That was what 37 - 38?

They were after people to work there you know.

Was that the beginning of the war or before?

Before the war, yes.

So what did you do at Courtaulds?

Well it was called tape wrapping, with the silk.

So what did you get paid there as a sixteen year old?

I think it was twelve shillings and ninepence, and we paid four shillings bus fare.

So you had to catch the bus from Mould and went down to Courtaulds in Flint.

In Wateley's busses.

Did you work shift work?

No just the days.

Nine to five?

No it would be about seven or halfpast seven till five.

So you worked a fortyeight hour week?

Yes and if they saw you eating a sweet they could send you home because you could dirty the silk.

Do you remember those days kindly?

No not very much because I didn't like working there.

So was it hard work as well?

It was really, yes.

Physically hard work?

Yes yes you had to put the cakes we called them on to a tray. Then you had to stack them up about ten high.

So you didn't have a great social life then?

No, not really no.

So you got your wages minus the four shillings for the bus and you gave it to your mom?

Yes

And she gave you something back?

Yes we would go to the dance for a shilling on a Saturday night.

That was in Mould

Yes, Mould town hall.

That was after the beginning of the war?

No before the war that was. Because the football team called the Alex they used to have dances there a lot and you paid a shilling to go in and tuppence to hang your coat up.

So was there drink there and so on?

You could have a cup of tea if you wanted but we never used to bother.

No booze?

No, oh no no.

Did people used to drink beforehand?

Yes that's right yes.

So what time did it close?

About eleven o'clock.

So people would go to the pub till about ten then come in for the last dance?

Yes that's right.

Did you go to the pictures?

Oh yes to the Savoy.

Did you socialize with the people you worked with?

Not really no.

The people from Mould you went with.

Oh sometimes yes.

So in 1941 you went to work at Rhydymwyn?

Yes at Rhydymwyn.

So why did you make the swap?

We had to go, yes yes.

Tell me about this. So why did you have to go?

Because the war was on and you were more or less conscripted into it. I wanted to go into the WRENs but my mother and brothers wouldn't let me go so I had to stay at home.

So at eighteen you had to register?

Yes that's right.

And that would be 1941?

Yes and with me having a funny name Kenvin I've been called Ken all my life I had calling up papers.

You would have been all right in the navy! So you went to the conscription officer or whatever?

Yes

And he said you've got a choice of so-in-so or so-in-so. He said now you will go and work at Rhydymwyn.

Yes

Can you remember going there your first day?

No not really. But I remember my clocking in number. Twentytwo, fortytwo.

So when you went there what did you go as? What job were you going to do there?

Straight away we went with the shells with the gas in.

What at K5?

K4 and K5 yes.

Was the money good?

I forget really but I think it was much more than Courtaulds, but I forget how much.

Doris told me she was born in 1920 so she would have been nineteen and she was paid five pounds.

Oh yes

Which surprised her because she was only getting paid two pounds before. She also said that the person that recruited her insisted that she give up a pound of her wages to war savings.

You could do that voluntarily really, yes.

So you went to work there and you were going to work at K4 K.5. You were going to do the loading of the mustard gas into shells?

Yes

Did you have any special clothing?

No we just had, it was like cotton stuff like a khaki coloured and a blue V on it that's all, and a little hat.

So what did you actually do in K4 K5?

Well we used to put the shells on a conveyor belt and then we used to put battleship grey paint on it, and it must have been quick drying. And then we'd have to go along and put detector paint round the rim and at the bottom. If you smelt like gas it was leaking but it would turn red, the detector paint. And then you'd send for the top chemist to come.

So did you spray it on or paint it on?

No paint it with a little paint brush, and you put the battleship grey paint on with just a rag to do it quickly.

So when you did that and had a problem can you remember the name of the chemist that came?

Dr Hill

Good. So did you work shift work?

Seven till one, one till nine, nine till seven on nights. The morning shift was the lowest hours.

So you were making shells not bombs?

No the shells were there twentyfive pounders, they were full of gas. We had to put them on the tray, it would move along.

They put those into water to see if they leaked?

No not those, they had like big canisters put in the water.

Sixtyfive pounders?

Yes that's right. We would have to put a Y and 4 with a little steel, I don't know how to describe it, it was metal and we used to have to hit it with a hammer. I would go along and put a Y then go along and put 4.

It's called a stencil.

No that's not a stencil. No with a stencil you had like a paper and you'd get a brush and black.

A punch?

Yes a punch that's right. I couldn't remember the name.

Do you remember what Y4 was?

No

It's a type of mustard gas.

I thought it would be but I wasn't sure.

So you went in past the guys on the gate?

In the main gate.

So you went on the bus did you?

Yes, and there was a lot of double decker busses then going around.

Can you remember the names of the guys on the gate?

Mr Kelly, I think there was a Mr Williams.

Do you remember Sergeant Marshall?

Perhaps I didn't know him perhaps I'd know him if I saw his face but I couldn't.

There are rumours that there was a knight on there called Sir James Dunn I know it repeatedly comes back. Have you heard of him?

No

So how did you get from the gate to K4 K5, just walked down?

Walked yes

So were you aware when you finished with the shells, did they go to the DA, to assembly?

I don't know they used to take them away but I don't, never knew, I thought perhaps they would take them to the sidings because there was wagons inside and we had to work in them sometimes. Yes and jump out!

You were in the K buildings? For how long?

Almost towards the end of the war and then we went down to where they were doing the smoke bombs in the main assembly.

Yes that was in assembly in the danger area.

Yes

To backtrack to the K buildings you were in the K building for nearly three years?

Yes

I had a view that in 41 it was mostly male labour but that by 44 it was mostly female labour.

Yes I should imagine it would be.

Did you see the things being moved about the roads as you went in and out?

Yes coming from Runcorn.

Can you tell me about the things moving about?

There would be a patrol car in the front and one in the back.

That was a tanker sort of thing?

Yes two or three of them would come.

Can you remember the building they went to?

No

Can you remember the other things on the roads there? They had some sort of trams to drag things around didn't they? Some green vans or something. Can you recall those?

No I can't remember that but I remember they had them in Broughton when I worked there after the war.

Were you ever in the tunnels?

Just went once I think but I wasn't down there long. I come back up. We got enough to work here so I came back up.

Can you tell me what it was like when you went into the tunnels?

It was all like whitewashed the walls and that. It was very very cold.

Still is. So you went down there did you turn left or right?

I forget now.

You went there and they had machines there which were filling shells was it?

I think so yes. I think they just took us down there and when they found out how many they wanted they sent us back. I wasn't there long.

There were machines down there?

I think so.

Which were loading shells?

I'm not quite sure we just went there and we were glad to get out really. You didn't bother to look round.

Can you remember as you were there in 41, 42, 44 can you remember the King and Queen going round?

Yes

Just tell me what you remember about it.

I wasn't working but I saw it passing I heard afterward about it.

Can you remember the Duke of Kent being there?

No

Margaret Bromfield she was the first lady cabinet minister in the Ramsey MacDonald government. She was there because she was the person who looked after the welfare of ladies in government factories.

Oh yes.

If you can't remember you can't Do you remember Rob Wilton?

I remember him but I don't remember him coming there.

Don't you, oh he was in there. I'm told it was on workers playtime.

Workers playtime yes we used to have that.

So when you were in the K buildings did they used to pipe music to you? Radio programs

No I never heard it.

You told me you didn't smoke. Can you remember what people did smoke in those days?

Woodbine and Craven A I think.

Did you have a bath at home, an inside bath?

At home? No

Was your toilet outside?

Up the garden path.

Did you have toilet paper?

No, squares. (Newspaper)

Did your pipes freeze in the winter? Did you put sacking round them?

My dad was always busy being a plumber. And he used to charge seven and six then.

And you got paid less than that at Courtaulds didn't you

Yes

What sort of soap did you get? Did you get Palmolive and things like that?

Lifebuoy soap.

So you brought a bath from outside in?

Yes

So was that everybody

Yes

Was that one day you brought it in?

Yes only one day.

Was that Friday?

Yes Friday, wash your hair.

And how many times a week did you wash your hair?

Only once. On Friday.

Do you remember that soap in big long bars and you cut bits off.

Oh Yes

And packets of soap powders, Persil

And Rinso.

Was the food ok in the war?

My brother's wife, her mother had a small holding in Colwen. So we used to have butter and that.

So what about clothes I bet you did well with two brothers.

They were in the army my two brothers when the war was on. One was in the Welsh guards and the other in the Artillery. My mother used to buy the tickets of the women that had got a lot of children. We would go to Liverpool twice. Once in the summer and once in the winter for clothes.

To Owens?

Yes

Did you get meals at Rhydymwyn?

We used to take our own and an old lady would cook them or warm them up for us. There was a canteen but I didn't buy food there. They could do when they were on days but we were on shifts.

So in the war when you went to work at Rhydymwyn what was the social life then? You used to have some more money.

Yes we used to go to the dances when we were on mornings. Sometimes three times a week on a Monday, Thursday and Saturday. On a Monday there was a man called Jack Kline and he was evacuated here. He was working on the AID inspection. On every Monday he would have a lot of Victor Sylvester's records. For an hour he would teach you how to dance. We were nearly all good dancers afterwards. This would finish about half ten to eleven. Then on a Thursday we went to the posh dance. That was half a crown. And we would go on the Saturday to the shilling dance which was cheap.

So were there a lot of servicemen around?

Oh yes. Airmen from Sealand and soldiers billeted in Plas Teg you know the haunted house. They used to come, and a lot of Polish soldiers from Penleigh. We used to smile because when they took you back after dancing they would kiss your hand. They would say to me go on, Ken you have a kiss.

Do you remember the Americans around here?

They used to come but we didn't bother with them much because they were doing this Jive and throwing you through their legs. So we just ignored them really.

Did coloured ones come?

No I didn't see any coloured ones.

Did you see anything of the scientists?

Those young men yes there were about six and they would come to the dances on the Thursday. We used to have a dance with them. We used to have flared skirts and I talked to one of them and he said I will bring some pellets next week to hold your dress down. Because I used to try and hold it when I was dancing. They never connected with any other girls, I never saw them take anyone home .

Did you go to the evenings there in Maes Alyn? they had social evenings there.

No my mother was very strict and she wouldn't let us go.

So you had plenty of clothes coupons. I guess you didn't get much fruit in the war?

No but there was an old lady and her husband had a grocery business and she used to come to the back door and she would have bananas under her pinney (apron). Some bananas for Ken she used to say to my mother.

So what happened after you came out of the K buildings, you went down to assembly? The Danger area.

Yes in the pellet shop.

Where they had the explosive in pellets?

Yes it used to go round on a little machine and pressed down to make the pellets go solid. Then they would take them to a place called the ovens. They would go in there to harden up.

So that was the explosives you were dealing with then?

Yes there was only about nine of us in the one building. They were all scattered in case there was an accident.

Can you remember between the buildings there was the asphalt? the pathways were asphalt so it didn't spark. Were those paths between the buildings covered over?

We used to have steps to go up to the what do you call it, the magazines. To fetch powder from there.

So when you went over there was there a lift there?

I only saw the steps I think.

So did you walk up a platform to the magazines or alongside a platform? There definitely was a lift there which lifted it up twenty four feet up. At the side were some steps which went up to a platform. Also on the left hand side were some steps which went up there but not to

the platform. So when you got up there to the path between the two magazines what was the path like? Was that covered over?

Yes

I know it's a thing to ask you to remember but did it have a roof on it? So you go up there and you turn left or right

One magazine was left and one was right.

I forget now.

So when you got the explosive how did you carry that down?

I forget really.

Did you have a trolley to pull it along?

No I think we used to come down steps, I'm not sure. We used to go in the night for it.

So were there lights up there you could follow the paths?

I think there was because there were a lot of flying beetles. I didn't like them. I think I was more worried about the beetles than the explosives.

When you went into the danger area into assembly did you go through any gates or anything?

Oh yes and a lady used to search you to see if you had any clips in your hair. There was a dirty side and a clean side you had to climb over. You used to have to put shoes on to go to the dirty side. You used to have to take your shoes off and put their shoes on.

So you went through the gates there and got checked in. Just to the left of there was there a canteen?

I forget because I wasn't working there all that long. Because it was towards the end of the war.

So when you went down to the building you were going into you went down a pathway. Did that pathway have any kerbs on it or anything like that?

I can't remember because I wasn't very interested as I had nearly finished working there. I was more interested in the K buildings than down in assembly.

They had officers down there as well didn't they? Officers in the assembly.

I don't know. I know airmen came to look what we were doing in the K buildings. And Americans but I never saw any British soldiers. They would stay in the Antelope.

When you were down in assembly can you remember the traffic down there? How things were carried around and so on? How did they move the shells and so on from building to building?

I don't know if they had like a trolley thing.

Can you remember the railway platform down there? There was a guy that ran that, can you remember his name?

No

The only way we know him is that there is a piece of graffiti on the wall and he is called John the Basted. I know you may not know this but I need to ask you. My feeling was that the platform was only for things coming in. Things going out went up the other side.

Yes

Did you get oranges and things like that?

I only saw bananas

Did you get any air raids there?

No but we used to hear the German planes going over because they made a different sound to ours.

Did you ever go to the decoy site at Cilcain?

No

The visitors used to stay in the antelope. Can you remember anything about the Antelope field? At the side of the Antelope with the big tanks there?

(no answer)

Was it lit up at night were there lights, street lights at night?

No You couldn't have a torch even, no.

So how did you find the buildings on dark nights?

I can't remember but we used to find our way. I think they must have had lights because these beetle things used to be around.

Funny question, was the water always clean? The water out of the taps.

Sometimes it was and other times not .

Yes the water came from Birkenhead and there were a number of reports of things going on there. On the railways was there a lot of activity with wagons and so on in the war?

The Americans used to be up and down the road in big lorries, They used to be stations at Denbigh. A lot of the drivers were coloured and you were frightened to cross the road because they came so mad.

So you worked in the DA till the end of the war? Do you recall VE day? Did you have a street party?

Yes a street party that's all we had. My uncle had a field and they had a big party in the field.

So you were twenty two by the end of the war. Did you have a regular chap during this time?

Yes I had one that was stationed at Plas Teg. But I think he was a bit of a roving eye so I finished with him.

So after VJ day the war was over. What happened with you and Rhydymwyn? How did you leave there?

I went to work in Broughton on the pre-fabs. It was in the very bad winter (1946) because they closed the factory down as it was too cold to work.

Did your money change when you went to work at Broughton?

Yes it was a few pounds more because you used to get bonus.

So what do you remember about the winter of 1946?

It was terrible. Up to our knees in snow and we couldn't go to work as they had closed the factory at Broughton. I had met my future husband by then. I met him in the dance and he lived in Chester. When the factory closed I thought I won't see him anymore he will go and work somewhere else. But he came back and we got together.

When people didn't turn up for work at Rhydymwyn did they get fined or anything? If you didn't work did you get paid for the day.

No and sometimes if we were busy we would work from nine till seven on the Saturday night shift and have to go in at one for the Sunday afternoon. We used to be tired and indigestion from eating in the night.

So you weren't aware of ration books because your mother did things like that. and your mother was just a housewife in the war?

Yes that's right.

So the war is over and all of the celebrations are over that's great because life is wonderful isn't it

Yes

Was there a disappointment after the war that things had not got better and that rationing had continued?

I think so yes.

Can you remember as a young person the view you took of a government which was pretty restrictive not getting anything and its a change from Churchill the war hero did people believe a bit that they had not done well by him do you remember?

I don't know I think with being young we weren't really interested.

So what music did you listen to in that era?

Sylvester and Vera Lynn. Bing and the two Leslies

Do you remember towards the end of the forties the very good summers we had? I know you're not Compton and Edridge, or Denis with the Brylcreme. 47 48 marvellous summers do you recall that

Oh yes

So the war was over can you remember how you felt about that?

Oh happy to get my brothers home.

So did they get jobs again fairly quickly?

Yes my eldest brother went to Summers, and my other brother went to Courtaulds in Greenfield.

After you had left them in 1941 and gone for the better money at Rhydymwyn!

So you got married in 1950?

Yes and I had Gerry in 1951.

Did you have a house to go to?

No I had a bed sit in Poole in Chester. I was just married eleven months when we had Gerry. My mother came there and she said you're not sticking this you're coming home. so we went back to live with my mother. She said one went away and three came back.

So when you were in the Digs in Poole did you have warm water?

Oh yes, yes

What about the toilet was that inside or outside?

It was inside yes.

And a bathroom, use of a bathroom?

Yes but you used to have to go into the kitchen, their kitchen to cook food.

People were just trying to cope weren't they. I guess They didn't get a big wage and to be able to let the room. It must have been very uncomfortable and to especially a little baby crying. So you went back home to mom in 1951

Yes

So from all your earnings your wartime earnings and your husband's great savings that he made you bought her a TV for the coronation did you?

No

Tell me about the coronation.

It was lovely.

So there was no TV, you got the information from the newspapers about Princess Elizabeth being engaged and so on.

Yes

And getting married, how did you learn about the coronation and all the preparations for it because here must have been an absolute stack of them.

I think it was on the radio more or less. On the wireless.

And on the day did you have a street party?

We had a party in the little mission down the road and my little boy went. I bought him a romper suit.

So did everyone go and watch old Fisher saying God save the Queen. It was the best piece of television in the period wasn't it.

Oh yes

Absolutely stunning and she looked so vulnerable didn't she. Everybody looked gun shy didn't they.

Yes

I was saying to Doris people were brought up in the depression, lived through the war years all of that, tough times run by older people. Then you get a young pretty girl That must have given hope to you.

Oh yes

I always think that people who didn't experience it don't know how big an event it was.

No

Your boy Gerry must have been a tiny tot on that day.

Yes I bought him a romper suit

Where did your husband work then

He worked in Broughton and my second husband was a manager with BP.

Kenvin thank you.