

Rosina Parry Interview.

This is an interview transcribed from the disc made by Colin Barber on 5th. December, 2008 at Rosina's home in Prestatyn. Some superfluous interjections and irrelevancies to the conversation have been omitted.

C. Rose, would you go back to when you were born, and your family and so on, for me.

R. Well, I was born in Llanerchymor near Holywell in 1920 and lived there until I was eighteen. Then I moved to Greenfield Holywell.

C. Can I ask you whether you had any brother and sisters?

R. Yes, I had a brother, Eric two years younger than me and then I had a sister thirteen years younger than me. My brother is dead now but my sister is still alive.

C. And your mother and father, what did they do?

R. My mother was retired you know. She didn't work from when she got married. My father was in the RAF Police at the Holway. At the munitions dump in the Holway. He was on guard there, during the war.

C. So he was in the Civilian Police?

R. There was a dump in the Holway. It used to be open to the public, you could go around to see it, but I don't know if it is now. It used to be and he was in the police guarding it during the war. They used to dump munitions there you see.

R. No, no, wait a minute now, he was working in Coutaulds before.

C. OK.

R. And then he was in the 1914-1918 war. He went in when he was eighteen then got wounded in France in the battle of the Somme.

C. Did he get gassed at all?

R. No, no.

C. He was lucky, lucky to survive.

R. Yes he was, yes.

C. So what did he do when he came home from the army?

R. I don't know, I'm not sure to be honest, I don't know.

C. So did your mother work?

R. My mother did, yes, she was in service.

C. So where was she in service?

R. Different places, I wouldn't know now. I think she was in Eaton Hall once, she was all over the place, different places you know.

C. Yes, all working class girls went into service in those days.

R. Yes, yes, she ended up as a cook. She was a cook in one of the last halls she was in. She didn't talk much about it you know.

C. Yes, someone was telling me they went to work for six and seven pence a week.

R. The first place she went to was Yorkshire and that was where she met her sister-in-law because her brother was a Petty Officer in the Navy the first war, he got torpedoed three times and he used to go to visit my mother.

C. So did you go to the local school?

R. To Greenfield council school.

C. That's when you were five?

R. Yes and when I was eleven I passed the eleven plus. My name was on the Roll of Honour at Greenfield School before they pulled it down. It was a board with the Roll of Honour on, I think I was in the last log to go from there in 1931. And I went to the Holywell County School as it was then.

C. Isn't that the one Emlyn Williams went to?

R. Yes, the same one. The Holywell County School, I've got photographs here of the place, then when I was fifteen, I left to go to work in Courtaulds, the girls did that, like these two that were in Rhydymwyn were in school with me. They did the same, they left and worked at Courtaulds the same. I was what they called a bookie. It was booking what the girls used to do on the reeling you know, what they did in an hour and what they did in a day. How much they did in a week because in those days you had to do a certain amount of reels. Then I left there at eighteen to look after my grandmother and grandfather because they were very ill and I was debating what to do. It was the beginning of the war you see and I was there three to four months when my grandmother died so my grandfather came with me to live at my mothers in Greenfield and then I was working in a place called Bradleys' a mans' shop. I used to do the books and things you see. He was an elderly man in there you see.

C. And this was in Greenfield?

R. No, Bradleys was in Holywell. I've got letters and things to show you if you want.

C. And did they have those chutes in there, in the shop? With the money in?

R. Yes it was an old fashioned shop. And the war was going on and I didn't know what to do, to join up you know, join one of the services, but my mother didn't want me to you know. My uncle was working in Rhydymwyn and he was very friendly with Mr. Barnett you see he was the manager of this department I was going to go into. The Aeronautical Inspection Department he told me about them. I was very interested and so I wrote in, I've got the letters here that I wrote in to ask for a clerical job. They didn't have any vacancies at the time, but if I liked to go along for an interview, which I did, and he offered me the job as a viewer, an inspector really. We had to make sure that the ICI was doing the job properly. I was only on that

inspection for a few months and a vacancy came in the office, so I got the job of Records Clerk.

C. So which year was this?

R. I applied for the job on 17th October 1941 I'll read it to you, with reference to your recent application for employment I have to say that there is no vacancy in this department at present, but you may attend for an interview on any afternoon next week bringing a card of introduction from your local Labour Exchange it may be possible to consider you for an early vacancy.

C. So that was in 1941? So what happened between 1939 and 1941.

R. I was working at Bradleys.

C. So were you sent by the Labour Exchange?

R. No, I did this on my own. My uncle was there and I wanted to do something for the war effort.

C. So were you married already?

R. Yes, I was, I got married in June 1941; so my name was Parry after.

C. If we can go back, people I have been speaking to said that an Act was passed that all girls or ladies of a certain age had got to register and they gave you a choice of which service you could go in or they directed you to where you could work. So did you register?

R. No, as I told you my mother didn't want me to go in the services so I wrote to Rhydymwyn myself. To this Mr. Barnett was very friendly with my uncle you see. That's how I got to go for the interview.

C. So where did you meet your husband?

R. He was a local boy, from Brynford near Holywell; his father was a building contractor who had his own business up in Brynford, and he worked for his father.

C. So you got married when you were twenty-one?

R. My husband was in the forces, he was twenty-one and I was twenty-one.

C. That's nice, can I ask that at that period, 1939 to 1941, where were you living?

R. I was still at my mothers', he was in the army.

C. so did you have a social life before you married? Did you go to dances and so on?

R. Yes, we used to go to dances in Holywell Town Hall; that was where I met him. My friend and his friend, I think that's how it happened.

C. So what did it cost to go in the dance?

R. I can't remember these days, but it wasn't much you know.

C. A shilling or so? The bigger ones were two and six. That was a lot of money then.

R. Yes, it was a lot of money, sometimes he used to meet me from the shop if he was on leave and he'd see his uncle and his uncle would give him half a crown. With him being in the forces it was a lot of money to him.

C. So, did you smoke?

R. No.

C. Can I ask you some things about home? I'm interested in social history about some things when you lived in Greenfield. Did you have an indoor toilet?

R. Yes, we did. We didn't in the beginning but after we did.

C. And did you have an indoor bath?

R. No, no.

C. So you had to bring a tin bath in?

R. Yes, there were three bedrooms there. The houses are still up in Greenfield. Sycamore Terrace, Greenfield, it was on the Mostyn road. The red houses they called them, all lovely red brick. They're there today.

C. Could you tell me the number of times you had a bath in a week?

R. Well, with my husband being a builder, he built my mother a place in the corner.

C. A boiler?

R. Yes, that's it, a boiler, so we had plenty of baths we did. We had this boiler, we were well off. We were very lucky during the War, my father-in-law as well as a builder had a small holding. He used to have all the contracts from the Flintshire County Council. I could show a billhead from him. They used to kill their own pig, had plenty of eggs, fowl, rabbits. We were never without food during the war.

C. In the years after the war, can you remember what soap you used?

R. That coal tar soap, you know that old fashioned coal tar soap.

C. Pears. Pears' was posh soap wasn't it? Did you get those long bars of soap?

R. Yes, yes, like a greeny colour wasn't it.

C. Do you remember the soap powder you used?

R. Persil.

C. There was Rinso. The people who smoked, can you remember the cigarettes?

R. Woodbines, my husband did. Always Woodbines he used to smoke, and then Capstan. If he was well off with money to spare he used to smoke Capstan, but he smoked Woodbines mostly.

C. And toilet paper. People didn't have toilet paper in those days did they?

R. We used to keep tissue paper. People that had parcels used to keep the tissue paper, nice soft tissue paper.

C. And the outside toilets?

R. Yes, ours was on the bank at the back of the house until we had the indoor one, and we used to take candles in a glass bottle and a candle there in the toilet as well.

C. Were the pipes wrapped?

R. Yes.

C. You can see I'm trying to build a picture of how you lived.

R. Yes, if you'd told me I'd have got things ready for you. I'd got no idea of what you were going to ask me did I?

C. That's the best way. It comes over naturally. I'm not just interested in Rhydymwyn; I'm interested in how people lived then. So you got married in 1941 and you went to work in Rhydymwyn then.

R. Yes, I got married in Rehobeth Chapel in Holywell because my Chapel in Greenfield was bombed during the war so I couldn't be married there. So I got married in Rehobeth Chapel in Holywell, all in Welsh. Our Minister was Welsh and he wouldn't marry me in English even though my husband wanted to be married in English. The whole service was in Welsh.

C. Do you speak Welsh?

R. Yes, I've always spoken Welsh since I was a child.

C. And your husband?

R. And my husband did too. Both of us Welsh speaking.

C. So you were travelling to Rhydymwyn from Greenfield.

R. Yes, I used to get the bus from Greenfield to Holywell and the bus to Rhydymwyn. It used to go over the mountain and then by the Mold Road there was a junction, Mold or Rhydymwyn, and I used to walk from the corner all the way down when I was working days there. But when you were working shifts there was a bus you see, but I used to go on this Philips bus and walk down.

C. So in the period you still lived at home.

R. Oh yes, my husband was in the forces. We hadn't got a home you see.

C. So you went to Rhydymwyn in the autumn of 1941 and you are an administrator. Whereabouts in the factory did you work?

R. We had a pass to get in, an ICI pass, I've got it here. Through the main gate, you had to have an ICI pass, and then I'd go into this building where I'd inspect. You had to go into this building and you had your own locker in it where you used to have to

take all your own clothes off and put them in the locker. Then you used to go through the shower room into the other side where you put their clothes on. Their trousers and overall, like a coat overall.

Then coming home at night you had to take off their clothes and leave them there to be washed and go through the showers. They were all Liverpool girls working there and we Welsh girls were very naïve. We didn't know half of what they did but we learned a lot. We used to have loads of fun, they didn't mind running about naked and my friend she was a bit bonny and she was very shy and they used to tease her. Then we'd have a shower, go back into the other room, put your own clothes on and go home. That was a routine everyday. Has anyone else mentioned that to you?

C. Yes, where actually did you work?

R. While I was an inspector, I was going around inspecting the bombs, if they were alright, you put your own stamp on them in the caves, you'd make sure they were OK, put your stamp on them, if they weren't they were rejects. When the vacancy came in the office, the first day I walked in I didn't know this friend of mine from school was there, I hadn't seen her since we were 16. She was working in the office but wanted to go as an inspector she preferred to go out of the office, she taught me the job. Iris Gallagher was her name before she was married, Iris Evans it was then. Ever since then we've been friends she was godmother to my daughter until she died. Her father had a big shop in Holywell, everyone knew them, Gallaghers.

C. Just let me back track a minute, when you used to go into the caves, tunnels, there was one big entrance and two smaller entrances.

R. Yes.

C. So you used to go in the big entrance.

R. Honest truth, I can't remember.

C. Can you remember there being machines in there?

R. Oh I've seen the men; I'll put you on to someone who used to work there. I used to see the men wearing gas masks filling and doing it was terrible work.

C. And just beyond that they had massive 65 ton tanks.

R. Yes, that's right.

C. Chambers C and D.

R. I saw all that when we used to go through you know. My uncle, I don't know what he used to do there, he used to do allsorts of jobs there, that's how he came to know Mr Barnett, my boss. There was a man working there from Holywell, Barnabus, his son Thomas Barnabus was a boxer, he has been doing things about Rhydymwyn, there is a book out he's been talking about his father in the gas chambers. He's still alive, if ever you want to get in touch with him.

C. I'd love to get in touch with him.

R. He knows all about his father working in the gas chambers.

C. So initially you were inspecting the bombs in the tunnel.

R. Yes

C. So you'd be inspecting the bombs and not the shells.

R. Yes that's it.

C. The shells were for the army and the bombs were for the air force.

R. Yes just the bombs.

C. You did this in the tunnels, not K4 or K5.

R. Just the bombs in the tunnels.

C. So you are doing an administration job after that?

R. Yes

C. Can you tell me about the job?

R. I used to keep records of what was coming in and going out.

C. Where were you located?

R. In the office, they had their own office the A.I.D. I had my own desk.

C. Was the A.I.D. office in assembly?

R. No it was on its own.

C. Were the offices down towards the bottom of the sire?

R. I can't remember now.

C. Because to inspect them they would have to be complete I think, which would mean you would be in the assembly area.

R. Yes, surely we would be.

C. You would have to go through some great big gates, you get on the factory and halfway down go towards the gates which led to the assembly area.

R. Yes,

C. So the ones up this end were big buildings, the ones down that end were little buildings.

R. Yes

C. Can you recall that?

R. No, it was quite a big building we were in on our own. I can't remember really, all those years ago. I haven't been thinking about it. Nobody has talked about it for all these years. I've got the book here somebody published, have you got it?

C. Yes

R. I read that and thought to myself, why there isn't any mention of A.I.D. in it.

C. Its not very accurate.

R. No, no mention of it whatsoever because we did very good work there, made sure everything was safe going out.

C. I'm fairly sure you worked in assembly because that is when you would inspect the bombs before they went off, and they would have been loaded onto trucks and then on trains and stored down the quarry. So you were down in A.I.D.

R. Yes.

C. How long were you in A.I.D.?

R. Well I've got the letter here when I handed my notice in on 16th June 1944, but I wasn't working there at the time, before this date I had to go into hospital, I had a baby which I lost. I've got this letter here, they collected, a Doris I can't remember her surname she was the welfare lady she lived at 6, Conway Street Mold, the letter dated Tuesday 5th January 1944, she wrote to me saying "I am writing you a line, hoping it will find you better, we are all hoping you will be home again soon" (from hospital). "I am enclosing £6.15d. (It was a lot of money in those days) from all the A.I.D. staff. Hoping you will soon be better". 6th June 1944 I handed my notice in.

C. On D Day.

R. I'll read you the letter now, "In reply to your letter dated 2nd June, 1944, it is decided to inform you that in order to obtain your release from this department it will be necessary to complete the attached form, giving reasons for your release and enclosing a medical certificate, when this form has been completed it must be forwarded to me as soon as possible". From the Inspector in charge, it's got on the bottom, "Sorry to hear that you have still not quite recovered".

C. Did you work days normally or shift work?

R. I worked shifts when I was on the inspecting and then days in the office.

C. Do you recall the Queen going there?

R. No, the Duke of Kent came there.

C. Do you remember seeing the King and Queen there; the Duke of Kent went just before them.

R. No, I must have been ill then, but I met the Duke of Kent, he was tall and slim, nice looking.

C. Most of the Royal Family are tiny aren't they?

R. Yes, he was taller than the others; he was a lovely looking man.

C. Do you remember Rob Wilton being there?

R. We used to have all different people in the canteen.

C. Did they broadcast Workers' Playtime over the Tannoy; did they used to play music?

R. No. I didn't have any noise in the office where I worked.

C. Do remember a lady called Margaret Bromfield, an MP, going there to meet all the workers?

R. No.

C. She was very famous, the first lady Cabinet Minister.

R. No. no.

C. Do you remember Joan Hammond going there?

R. No, no.

C. She was definitely there.

R. It was so long ago, I've forgotten.

C. I've got a picture of Joan Hammond standing next to Mr. Thomas, the Works Manager, do you remember him? So because you were married you didn't have a social life, didn't go to dances.

R. Oh yes, I still used to go out to the pictures and things; I had a friend, her husband was in the forces as well.

C. So you didn't take up smoking and drinking?

R. No, I was brought up Chapel. I expect that was why, I still don't drink now, these days.

C. Did you ever run into any of the scientists that worked there?

R. No. My uncle, the one that got me the job, he was very interested in things like that, he did invent some thing for Courtaulds once; that was why he was friendly with Mr. Barnett of AID.

C. The scientists stayed in Maes Alyn, the house on the way into Mold.

R. Yes, yes.

C. Do you remember the people on the gate?

R. Yes, we knew the men on the gate, we used to hand our pass to them; they knew everyone.

C. Do remember a Sergeant Marshall?

R. No, I don't, but someone showed me a photograph of his father when we went to that meeting; he was in the Fire Service.

C. David, he comes from Denbigh. We are told one of the guards was a knight, a baronet, Sir James Dunn. I've not been able to trace him anywhere. Did you go to any of the Whist Drives or lunchtime talks?

R. My boss, Mr. Barnett, our secretary, Miss Young from Liverpool. She was a nice person; my uncle was good friends with her although he was married. As I said, Us Welsh girls were really naïve; those Liverpool girls taught us a lot, really nice girls.

C. These girls that came from Liverpool, were they instructed labour? Were they people that were told they had to work there?

R. I've no idea.

C. Did they live locally?

R. Yes, they lived locally. Olwen that worked in the office with me lived locally; she married a Mold boy.

C. At Marchwiel seven thousand people were sent to work there. They were billeted there.

R. Most of them were billeted in Mold. Miss Young was; she was a very nice lady.

C. There must have been a lot of soldiers around.

R. Not in Holywell, it was very quiet. While I was ill during the war I went down to stay with my husband for three months when I came out of hospital; to Barnstaple, lots of Americans there.

C. Did you see coloured Americans there?

R. Oh yes, lots at the dances there. We'd never seen dancers like it.

C. Some of the ladies I've spoken to said they wouldn't dance with them because they wanted to throw them between their legs. One of them she used to wear flared skirts and her clothes used to fly up. One of the RAF boys she went out with used to get her lead shot to put in the bottom of her hem to hold it down. People forget it must have been a great shock to run into coloured Americans.

R. Oh yes it was, but Devon was full of them, lots of Americans there. My husband was stationed there and Plymouth. I had two months in Barnstaple and one month in Plymouth. The bombing was terrible there I was glad to come home back to Wales, back to work.

C. Did you get enough clothing coupons? Did you struggle with them?

R. No, I've still got them and a ration book. We didn't struggle like that my parents-in-law used to make their own butter and everything it was no problem we were never short.

C. Just as you went round the site in Rhydymwyn, can you remember what was on the roads and how they moved things around.

R. I remember walking down in the snow, from the bus it was lovely looking at the trees, and going to the gate that's all I can remember really.

C. Someone told me it was a very happy place to work.

R. Oh it was, as I said these Liverpool girls were really great.

C. I do hear criticism of ICI who ran the site as an employer can you comment on that?

R. Well everyone that I met had no complaints about them; my uncle worked for ICI, his wife came to work there as well. I think she came to keep an eye on him because someone told her about him being friendly with Miss Young. A lot of people came from Mostyn working for ICI.

C. Can you remember people getting hurt from the mustard gas and so on?

R. A lot of people had spots on them but not killed.

C. People just didn't disappear?

R. No, you find this man Tom Barnabus he's very interesting if you can get hold of him, he'll tell you all about ICI because his father worked in the chambers.

C. So you got to D Day and resigned on D Day.

R. Yes.

C. So from 1944 until the end of the war you just stayed at home.

R. Yes.

C. When the end of the war came you didn't work.

R. No, I didn't work for a few years, then I worked for my brother-in-law I ran the betting shop in Greenfield for him, myself I ran the betting shop, it was a very busy shop we had all the people from Courtualds and the Paper mill across the road and Summers, Shotton; I ran the shop for 5 years. I worked as well for the Providence, car insurance and loans for 31 years, from when I was 31 to 61.

C. So when it came up to VE Day it must have been very exciting.

R. I don't remember much only that I was happy it was all over and done with.

C. Did you have street parties?

R. Oh yes, I went round collecting money from people and food we had a big one in Greenfield, long tables with all the children on.

C. So did people drink at that?

R. I've no idea.

C. So that was a rehearsal for VJ night so your husband must have come home by then.

R. Yes, he was stationed in Rhyl, got sent there just before the end of the war.

C. He came out of the army in 1945-46?

R. We were lucky really, he was on draft to go, that's why we got married when we did. He got seven days leave to get married. When he got back he had a letter to go into hospital because he had something wrong with his eyes. Had to go into hospital, missed the draft so he didn't go abroad. Stationed in Deal, Dover, and places like that.

C. So, when did he leave the army?

R. He got out of the army 6 months early because my father-in-law got this big contract to put water in all the farms. So he got my husband out 6 months earlier than he should have done. It was very important work to get the water into the farms, even went as far as Talacre, (council farms) in 1946.

C. Do you remember the winter of 1946-47?

R. Terrible, you couldn't go from Greenfield up to Brynford, where my husband was from, the snow was so bad. My sister-in-law came down to stay with us just before the snow came, she couldn't go home after. She had to stay with us in Greenfield; she couldn't get back to Brynford.

C. You were doing OK; your husband had a good job.

R. When my husband came out of the army we stayed for a few months with my mother. The Council had taken over some big houses on the Brynford Road, Holywell we rented two rooms and the use of the kitchen. We couldn't afford anything then. My husband stained all the floorboards, we used to make all our own rugs from old clothes. Furniture came from my mother and mother-in-law, my son was 12 months old then. It was lovely.

C. Did you have any problems getting food then?

R. No, never. We were lucky, my mother-in-law used to make lovely black pudding, a marvellous cook. She'd been in service as well. We were only there for 12 months in Holywell. My mother got us the house next door but one to her. I lived in No. 3 my mother lived in No. 5. We lived there for about 11 years then we bought a house in School Lane, Greenfield, behind the school. Then we bought this house here. I've been in this house 42 years. We only had a mortgage for a few years, my mother-in-law died. The small-holding was sold, so we paid the mortgage off. We were very lucky really. I worked all my life. I was 61 when I retired from the Providence.

C. Towards the end of the 40's the weather got better.

R. Oh beautiful.

C. Do you remember the cricket, summer of 1948?

R. My husband was interested in all the sports he used to play football, won the cup playing for Brynford; won the Flintshire Cup.

C. Do you remember at the end of the war they had an election?

R. I've got letters here from Irene White from Parliament thanking us; my husband was a big Labour man. When we lived in Greenfield my husband used to run our car for the voting. I've got two letters from Irene White thanking us.

C. So for you the end of the war was pretty good because the Labour Party was elected.

R. All the service men were big Labour men. I used to vote Liberal sometimes without him knowing or he'd have been cross with me.

C. Do you recall the death of the old King and the Coronation? What did you think about that?

R. Well it was very sad.

C. What did you think of the new Queen?

R. She's very good, she's excellent. Not very homely they say but a good Queen.

C. You being born in the 1920's are a child of the depression, then the war, the horrible weather after. Then all the old people who had been running the country, I just think myself the Coronation with a beautiful young Queen. I think it's a different generation, a new era, I think everything changed then.

R. Oh yes. This is a photograph of my grand-parents house, they were middleclass we were lucky we had 3 bedrooms, a big house with a big garden about an acre and a half. My brother-in-law was stationed in Germany, he managed to get a film for the camera my husband bought me for my 21st birthday; not many people had wedding photographs during the war. We were lucky. I was the only one in the terrace with a camera.