

13/10/2000

As you will see enclosed is a typeset copy done yrs ago concerning my first job and what I experienced. For a forty hour week my wage then in old money was six shillings and eightpence (today roughly 34<sup>p</sup>). Later when I became experienced machinist my wage increased to ten shillings (50<sup>p</sup>).

At that time the raincoat trade was only seasonal and would slacken off, sometimes a few orders for costume and mantles would be available to help out the situation.

When I reached sixteen I decided to look around for jobs with better rates of pay hoping it would help to increase my spending money. I did find a job that had a big order for making childrens navy gaberdines the wage was a little better but the firm was too strict we weren't allowed to speak or move away from the machine, when necessary we had to ask permission. After awhile I moved on this would be then 1937, I found work that suited me fine it was a happy go lucky place, I will always remember that firm called Weinbergs. Working hard didn't stop us from all singing together the latest songs from the Fred Astaire and GINGER ROGERS movies. Suddenly the making of the raincoats ceased Weinbergs received orders that could be described as war work, still only late 1937 the new work making anti gas suits was a little upsetting at the thoughts of war. By this time lots of Jewish refugees were arriving from Germany to escape the Nazis, our firm had room to employ a dozen or more.

1940 I had to leave Weinbergs the Government decided I should move on to more essential war work. I was then sent to a firm that produced shell cases that were being sent overseas. I had the job of making them waterproof by spraying them over with a special type of rubberized paint, this was a job I really hated.

Eventually in 1944 I got my release and I went back on the sewing machine making demob suits and raincoats ready for the soldiers coming home.

My next job 1956 was entirely <sup>NEW</sup> it was sewing together babies carrycots ready for them to be boxed up. Only being a small firm the work was pretty regular, I remember an order for one special carrycot which caused a great amount of fuss, the inside was padded with blue satin lining the hood and apron were trimmed with mink. Rumour got round the carrycot was ordered by Diana Dors the actress. When different designs were being tried I noticed they always involved me.

Sometime in 1970 British Airways wanted a carrycot easy to produce, it also had to be of thin blue fireproof plastic with the B.A. name stamped at one end also quickly to assemble, I think they were only to be used the once. I remember making six different samples as a result one was chosen, from this B.A. ordered a couple of hundred each time when required.

By the time I had reached the age of sixty I retired from Blowers in 1980, I had worked sewing carrycots for twenty four years and decided that was enough.

Whatever I have written you will have noticed I do tend to wonder on because I love to share my memories.

Ellen

### OUT OF SCHOOL INTO WORK

December 1934 was the time I left school in Collyhurst, having reached the age of fourteen it was time to move on. I already had a job in a Raincoat and Waterproof Factory opposite Strangeways Prison, and I was to start work at 8.30am on 2nd of January 1935.

Initially my job was to run errands, it wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a machinist but it was a job and that was the main consideration.

Not having a canteen on the premises the main items I had to go for were lunches and dinners, if anything had to be kept warm the gas stove was in the mechanics room which resembled a scrap yard.

Next to our workplace in Southall Street was a soup kitchen for the needy, and there were plenty of them. Over the main entrance engraved in carving was the name Philanthropic Hall. Daily there would be a queue waiting to go inside for the free bowl of soup, most of them were men and women I recognised, they were the dropouts who used a spare piece of ground next to Strangeways Prison. They would sit around small fires drinking their booze which was methylated spirits.

The old building is still there and now being used as a warehouse for Costume Jewellery. The large Commemorative Plaque in honour of those who opened the soup kitchen and helped with the upkeep is still there at the side of the main entrance.

Through going errands I got to know the area well and some of the things that went on. I had heard about a lady called Mrs Van der Else who was opposed to hanging and was often seen at Strangeways when a hanging was due. One morning I arrived early for work, seeing crowds of people outside the prison I was curious to know what it was about. A notice had just been pasted outside the main gate of the prison giving details of the hanging of a Buck Ruxton. If I'm right I think it would be sometime in March 1935.

This is when I got to see Mrs Van der Else she had just started the crowd of people singing the hymn 'Abide With Me'. Obviously she was a very wealthy lady who could travel about in a chauffeur driven limousine, she also looked dressed for the occasion in her black expensive clothing. I also noticed the chauffeur stayed quite close to her in a protective manner.

Having satisfied my curiosity I headed back to work, being a few minutes late was overlooked.

After awhile another school leaver came and took over the errands. I was then moved onto a buttoning machine which I didn't like one bit. The buttons we then used were made of bone which seemed to attract the rats.

Saturday morning the buttons would be put away tidily in boxes, come Monday morning all around the machine would be a mess, most of the buttons were chewed through and scattered all about. The mechanic would clean it up then I was back on the dreaded machine.

Eventually I was taken off it, I was breaking too many needles and I also moaned too much, this suited me fine. I then went on a sewing machine only sewing straight seams which was easy enough.

At that time teddy bear coats had come into fashion and our workshop received an order for a dozen. The seams were very thick and difficult to sew, before I knew it my finger was caught under the needle. The mechanic had to get the needle out, then I just bathed my finger, a new needle was put in the machine and I carried on sewing as though it had never happened.

After awhile I became a fully experienced machinist, I had achieved what I had set out to do.

Ellen Casey.