



Harris & Pearson Oral History Project

Betty Jewkes Interview

When did you work at Harris & Pearson?

1955-6 – before I was married, my maiden name was Moore. I lived in Lyndhurst Drive, and used to walk to work. My hours were 9 to 5 – I don't think I used to work Saturdays.

Why did you leave?

My parents bought a grocery business in Enville Street here (in Stourbridge), so I moved with them, because I was still under age anyway. Harris & Pearson was only my second job. I'd been to the comptometer school in Birmingham first. My first job was at Fred Wedgebury's over the road [in Brettell Lane], and I got to know the girls who worked at Harris & Pearson and they told me there was a job going there, and it offered £1 more than I was getting then, so I went.

Was Harris & Pearson's a good place to work?

It was a little bit Victorian, it wasn't as free, it was Mr this and Mrs so-and-so, nobody used Christian names.

What was your job there?

I'd also learned shorthand and typing as well, I'd been to night school for that, so I went on that basis, to do a bit of shorthand, and a lot of typing, filing, and I learned to use the switchboard there. [I also used the invoice typewriter] It was in a desk, and there were two long rails that ran the width of the desk, and a big well in it. This typewriter ran on these two rails, I think it was called an Underwood [Elliot?] Fisher, and you used to put a ledger underneath this typewriter to type through the ledger – you didn't take the pages out, you put the whole book underneath and you used to type, and the typewriter used to run up and down – wonderful machine that was. I operated it when Margaret was on holiday.

Whereabouts did you work in the offices?

Upstairs, in the middle office, where all that dark wooden board is, I sat facing that. I was by the window end; my desk was there, in that corner. If anyone came upstairs to see anyone, they came into our office – it was like a reception as well.

Can you recall the other people who worked with you there at that time?

There was me, and Leslie Tonks in our office, and there were only two women in the other office: Alice Pemberton, Mr Pearson's Secretary, and she was Victorian, she always wore dark clothing, long skirts and

she always wore a big hat. There was another girl there, her name was Margaret Sheffield, and she did all the invoicing. Downstairs, the girl that operated the weighbridge – she was another Junior – her name was Sheila, I can't remember her last name. There was a girl called Audrey Colley – her father was a blacksmith in Moor Street. There was a woman called Marie, who did the wages. The little office on the other side was rented out by E J & J Pearson, and a girl called Pearl Jones used to work in there, with another woman who I can't remember. Mr Pearson had a very young wife – he was a grey haired man, in his 50s – and he had two small children, and I think his wife was quite young.

How much contact did you have with people in the brickworks?

Not a great deal, but it wasn't through choice, I used to like and go downstairs and chat to people there, but it wasn't allowed. There used to be an old lady that I remember vividly, and I think her name was Capewell, but I can't be sure of that [Nellie Coleman]. She seemed a very old lady, and her hands seemed very knarled and grimy – she couldn't get the dirt out of her hands.

Can you describe what the office building was like inside?

The office to the left at the top of the landing, I think that was Mr Pearson's private toilet, and it was a locked one. Mr Pearson's office was just a big desk, with a fire.

Can you describe the office in which you worked?

Leslie Tonks' desk led on from mine – it was just a long row – and the filing cabinet was at the end by the door.

Can you recall the hinged glass panel above the hatch being used?

No.

Do you remember seeing or using the speaking tube device?

No.

Can you recall any unusual incidents that happened during your time at Harris & Pearson?

No, not really.

Can you recall any amusing incidents that happened during your time at Harris & Pearson?

No – it wasn't that sort of working environment, there was no joviality, it was very you go to work and this is what you come for.

Do you remember the tramp?

Vaguely – he used to live more over the Delph I think.

Is there anything else you can remember about your time at Harris & Pearson you would like to tell me about?

Not really – my mind was too full of what I was going to do when I got home, where I was going and who with – just earn the money and go.