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# Harris & Pearson Oral History Project

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## 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.