



Harris & Pearson Oral History Project

Mary Clark Interview

When did you work at Harris & Pearson?

Between 1939 and 1947.

How long did you work there for?

8 years - left in 1947, 'under a bit of a cloud' following a disagreement, but unwilling to elaborate. Went to Marsh & Baxters to do the same work.

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

Generally, yes – apart from the circumstances of leaving. Also met her husband there, who had her job before she did. He was moved to a new post in the works which was regarded as a reserved occupation, as was her's, so neither likely to be called up.

What was your job there?

Wages Clerk. It was the highest paid job there, apart from Mr Pearson's. She was paid 30s (£1.50) a week!

Did you do the same job all the time you spent at Harris & Pearson?

Yes.

What did your job at Harris & Pearson involve you doing?

Working out the weekly wages. A very complicated process which took all week. Wages calculated through a combination of time and piece rates. Very complex series of rates for each product made. Few people, mainly older women, paid a set wage. They made bricks in moulds from 'sloppy clay.' [The best bricks were wire cut from an extrusion machine]. The men either worked singly or in gangs of 5. If one man absent for a week or part of a week, then the rest of the gang got the same money, only divided by 4 instead of 5. The time clock was on the inside wall of the archway, directly opposite the double doors to the offices. No calculators, Ready Reckoners or slide rules were allowed – it was all done by hand and in your head. The pay was worked out by Tuesday afternoon for Ron Pearson (the manager) to agree. Then the details would go to the company's offices down The Delph for the wage packets to be made up. Mr Ron would collect the wages on a Friday morning and bring them up in his car. The men would be issued with the wages slips on a Wednesday afternoon, but not

paid until the Friday afternoon, after work (otherwise they'd disappear into the pub opposite (The Foley – now the New Wellington). They were paid, and wage slips issued, through a hatch in the weighing machine window. All the men were very acute, and knew what their wages should be to the last ¼d. Work also involved working the weighbridge. Only clay coming in was weighed. The procedure was to weigh the lorry plus its load on the way in, and then just the empty lorry on the way out – the difference was the weight of clay to be paid for. This was done because the TARE weight painted on the lorries was not always accurate. Tended only to weigh lorries from less regularly used suppliers. Most of the clay came from 'over the road', on Withymoor.

Whereabouts did you work?

In the main office on the ground floor, where the weighing machine is.

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

Mary Clark supplied a plan of the office and of the whole block, showing who sat where. She still has contact with Marie Allport, who succeeded her. See separate transcript of interview with Marie.

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

Quite a lot. She used to have to, or found reasons to, go into the works quite a lot. Everyone was friendly to her because she paid them and because her husband also worked there. She used to like going into the works, and found it fascinating to watch the kilns being loaded, fired, and unloaded. She also liked to go down by the canal to watch the boats being loaded and unloaded. The GW sidings ran down by the canal, and you could see bricks being loaded or unloaded to and from both railway and horse-drawn wagons. Some of the people who worked there were quite old. One of the ladies who sorted the clay remained until she was 75, and was only 'let go' because of her failing eyesight.

Can you describe what the office building was like inside?

Mary provided a plan which is shown opposite.

Can you describe the office in which you worked?

Very plain and simple. The table in their office was Mr Ronnie's old dining table, of which he was very proud.

Do you remember seeing or using the speaking tube device?

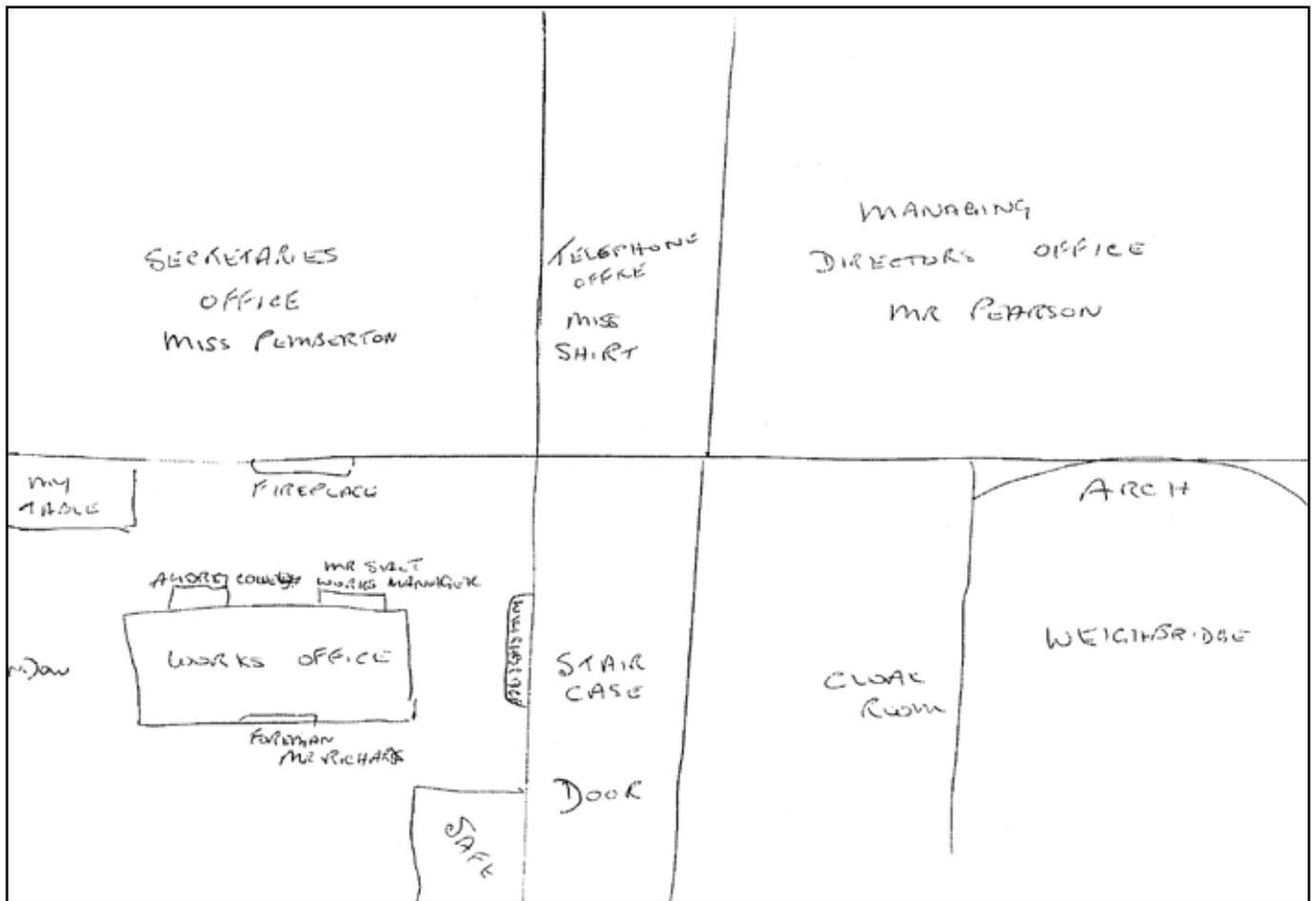
Yes – it connected to Mr Ron's office. There were 2 tubes, one to speak into, and one to listen with. To use it you took the stopper out of the speaking tube and whistled into it [no whistle provided]. The person upstairs heard this and picked up their tubes to respond. It was very effective and the sound was very clear. Mr Ron used it a lot, but the staff often ignored it! Also asked about the telephone, and confirmed the use of the little hatchway in the partition upstairs as being to pass the receiver through!

Do you remember the Centenary Celebrations ?

No – had left by then. Had seen one of the booklets. Used to have a book on the firebrick firms of the area, which was written by Elliot Evers, one of the later managers there. This [hardback] was very detailed and very good. .

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

A regular was Mr Thompson, the tramp. He was an educated man, and a musician, who had a little dog, which he kept under his coat. He would often sleep in whichever kiln that had just been emptied [and was therefore still warm]. He was a nice man, harmless and no trouble. Everyone knew him and was concerned to make sure that he didn't get bricked up in a kiln before it was fired.



Secretary
Marilyn Stevens

DR WILKINSON'S
OFFICE
Specialist clay.

Clay brought & weighed
Taken to mill
Mixed to correct moisture
Put through wire cutting Machine
for general batch
Taken to stand moulds
for specialist bricks
Taken to show & dried
on the floor
Set in kilns & fired
Cooled
Dressed from kilns
Loaded either on
Railway trucks or
Bucks on the canal

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

One Christmas during the war, some servicemen on leave came round and took some of the women brick makers over to the pub opposite. They came back a few hours later a bit merry, wearing the servicemen's caps, shouting for Mr Ronnie to come down. He got on the speaking tube and asked the staff in the office to get rid of them. [Mr Ronald Pearson was then a bachelor, and married late in life].

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

The offices opposite were effectively a separate company. They made special 'bricks', and such things as the radiant elements for gas fires. Just after the war they also started to make bricks for storage radiators – possibly the first to do so



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