

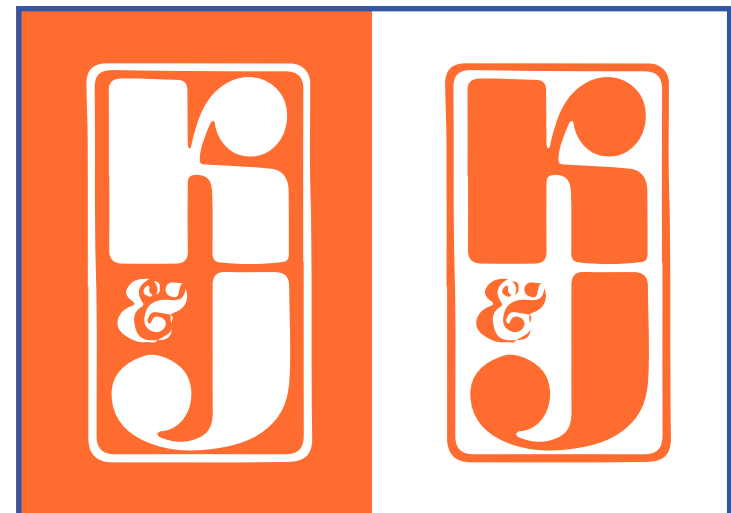


OUTWORK

OUTWORK

WOMEN WORKERS AT KENRICK AND
JEFFERSON PRINTWORKS

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BY
SOPHIE HUCKFIELD AND MULTISTORY





Historic England Archive. Aerial View of Kenrick & Jefferson (AP140711)

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

“There was a saying in West Brom, for a long, long time: ‘If you didn’t work at K&J, you knew someone that did’.”

- Karen Radburn
(employee at K&J)

INTRODUCTION	1
OUTWORK	7
THE HOUSE OF K&J	11
TESTIMONIES	17
OLIVE	19
PATRICIA	29
DENISE	39
KAREN	51
NIM AND MANESH	67
LISA	75
CARON AND JAN	81
YVONNE	93
CLAIRE	97
HANDS IN THE ARCHIVE	107
ACCESS TO LOCAL LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES	111
COLLATING HERSTORIES	117
CREDITS	121

INTRODUCTION

“I’ve got to say, more for the staff who I worked with, it was those years that I worked there, they was my best working years ever.”

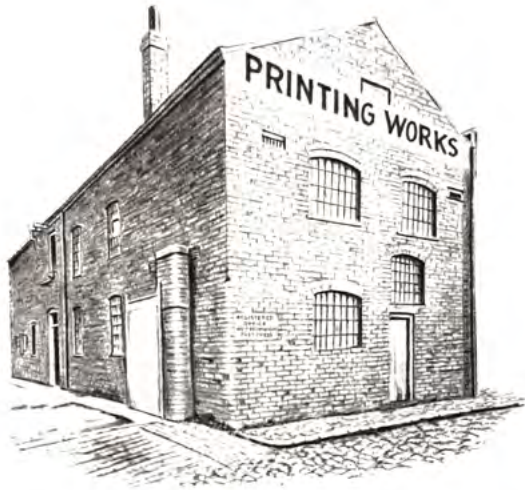
- Claire Boddy
(employee at K&J)

The House of Kenrick and Jefferson or ‘K&J’ as it was locally known, was an expansive printing factory and office supply company based in the Black Country in West Bromwich. At its height, it was one of the largest printing factories in the UK. They printed, cut, folded and bound everything from envelopes, calendars, cards to pre-printed business forms and cheques. In business for over 100 years, K&J was one of the largest local employers in West Bromwich and the surrounding regions, employing generations of families.

Whilst both men and women worked there, from its inception in 1878, K&J employed a large workforce of women who worked across the factory, offices and as casualised ‘outworkers’ from home. Whilst women have always worked, both in and outside the home, this narrative is often obscured in wider discourses around work in the UK. Women at K&J would often work in subordinate or manual roles, from culinary to

cleaning, secretarial, factory work, as packers, on payroll... Often when reproducing or presenting histories of work, these essential roles (which exist across many workplaces of this size and in this timeframe) are overlooked in the narrative. As is the essential caring work which is often placed on women, who would cook, clean and do the majority of childcare and emotional labour, in conjunction to their employed roles.

The project OUTWORK is centred around interviews with women who worked at K&J, alongside interviews with family members who have memories of their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins and friends who worked there. We interviewed a cross section of employees who worked in a variety of roles, bringing them together to discuss their experiences and stories of their time at K&J, alongside their memories of West Bromwich. The project is rooted in the heritage of women’s oral storytelling, referencing how working class women’s herstories are often shared anecdotally and passed down through a spoken tradition, rather than through more official archival channels.



K&J original factory site illustration, from the House of K&J book.

OUTWORK intends to share not only the work women did, but also what was created outside of the factory floor: the friendships, the social scenes and the cultures that emerged and have transcended the workplace. The work we do should never define us. However, the reality is that work - particularly for those from working class backgrounds - is something that we must spend the majority of our time doing. OUTWORK seeks to traverse how we can create our own intersectional, feminist definitions of work and have the opportunity to narrate our own lives. The project seeks to explore how women can make space to debate what work is, and could be, reflecting on what we create in tandem to, and beyond, work.

In parallel with workers' testimonials, creative workshops also took place which drew on the history of women in printmaking, radical press and zine making, utilising processes and methods used by radical women's print shops from the 20th Century (such as See Red Women's Workshop), alongside collaging processes such as 'femmage' - a woman-focused form of collage. The workshops incorporated archival imagery from K&J and personal archival materials shared by the participants. The official documentation and photographs by K&J presented a singular and top down narrative of the company. Working with the 'cut-

up' approach, opens up ways of 'troubling' the archive as a form of feminist practice. Through these creative processes, participants' were able to share their story of K&J through their own visuals, words and conversations alongside disrupting and reconfiguring the official archival materials.

Drawing on these processes, the project also reflects on unionism within K&J and the lack of representation for women as workers in the printing trades, both at K&J and more widely in the UK. Within the manufacturing sector, work accessible to women was often deemed 'low skilled' and at K&J women were rarely in management positions. Feminist print shops such as See Red Women's Workshop emerged out of a necessity to train women to learn printing processes and actively campaign for their rights. At K&J, apprenticeships were not available to women, despite the fact that 'there was a woman to every machine' (K&J employee, Patricia Price). This was mirrored more widely in the UK, as issues which directly affected women as workers lacked representation or solidarity from the Trades Union movement.

There is a rich history of women's movements, groups and campaigns in the West Midlands such as the Cradley Heath Women's Chainmakers'

Strike in 1910, whose victory helped to bring in a national minimum wage. Factory workers such as Jessie Eden who, in 1931, organised a mass women's strike at Lucas Industries in Birmingham, prompted a huge increase in the number of women in the Midlands joining British trades unions. Groups in the West Midlands campaigned across a range of issues, such as the Wolverhampton Black Women Co-op Centre, Birmingham Black Sisters and LGBTQ+ group The Birmingham Gay Liberation Front. Women, non-binary people and queer people have often worked together to challenge dominant ideas surrounding working conditions, alongside working to redefine and push beyond gender roles and binaries.

I am an artist from the Black Country. I grew up in Walsall and much of my family historically worked in industries across the region. I also trained and worked as an Engineering Technician since 2013. Often I would be in the minority of women and non-binary people working in these spaces and I would repeatedly hear the same myths regurgitated about the history of work, which often do not present a holistic picture. Material and Labour Histories are intrinsically embedded to colonialism. The British Empire was built from exploitation, extraction and violence and it affects different groups

in different ways in relation to the lived realities of gender, race, sexuality, health and their geographies. These histories and current realities continue to go unacknowledged and sidelined and this can obfuscate and erase our collective heritage and people's place within it. I seek to mediate how we can collectively make sense of these stories and how we define work.

This publication assembles together participants' personal herstories and includes testimonials, their images and workshop outcomes. In conjunction with this book, a public exhibition was also created, composed of these visual materials and installed on West Bromwich high street in September 2023. An audio sound piece, produced with Dr. Natalie Hyacinth and narrated by Emma Purshouse was also produced that is composed of the interviews and an original score based on the psycho-geography of West Bromwich that draws on testimonials from participants on local nightlife and the sounds of the factory.

OUTWORK shares a small number of women's experiences of working at K&J alongside their wider reflections on work and their lives beyond it. It is not intended to be a definitive or all-encompassing history of women's work or of K&J. Herstories are polyphonic,

rich, complex and expansive;
this publication is intended
to be a contribution to the
multitude of women's lives in
West Bromwich and Sandwell.

**When I say women, this word
always includes trans women.*

Sophie Huckfield (2023)

OUTWORK

The title 'outwork' was a term used at K&J and designated to those that did seasonal or casual work during busy periods, outside of the factory and usually in a domestic setting. The majority of work completed by 'outworkers' would involve repetitive tasks such as sorting and assembling boxes of cards or folding envelopes, with workers expected to complete between 8 to 12 boxes of thousands of cards and envelopes in a set timeframe.

The majority of this outwork was taken up by women who could fit it around childcare responsibilities and other part-time or domestic work. Outwork was also a more accessible form of income in the UK for migrant workers or those from Black and Asian backgrounds, who were often at the whim of discriminatory employment hiring policies of the time.

"Homework provided then, and still does today, another means of overcoming the lack of nursery provision, and the need to supplement a meagre wage. This involved either sewing or light assembly work, and was highly favoured by employers. It enabled them to pay the lowest wages, and to offload overhead costs, such as heating, lighting, electricity,

machinery and rent, onto the workers themselves. Homeworkers were classified as 'self-employed', which freed the firm from paying National Insurance contributions and fringe benefits such as sick pay or holiday pay. Being self-employed increased our vulnerability, and employers took full advantage of the opportunity to make direct cost savings. Taken on as additional labour during production peaks, homeworkers would be laid off during 'troughs', with the firm free of any liability to pay redundancy money, and immune to accusations of unfair dismissal. This practice was particularly favoured in the seasonal trades such as finishing or toy-making, which employed large numbers of Black women, as they do today. Then, as now, homework was one of the most feudal and exploitative forms of employment, and it is no coincidence that it has remained almost synonymous with cheap, Black, female labour."

- "Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain", by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe.

Outwork as a title encompasses the intersection and overlapping of where women's paid and unpaid labour meet. Outwork as a term reflects how

women not only have to take on employment outside the home but are also expected to take on childcare and domestic work such as food shopping, cooking, cleaning, alongside the emotional labour these require. These disparities still continue today and there remains a gender pay gap, with women making up the majority of part-time workers in the UK and still continuing to take on the bulk of childcare duties, both as mothers and grandmothers.



Workshop participant's collage: "The heads on the top represent the K&J 'bosses' and the hierarchy between management and the workers."

THE HOUSE OF K&J

“You always knew when it was one o’clock because K&J staff just filled West Bromwich town centre. It was like a mass exodus...It was a very, very big employer. And it’s very sad it closed down.”

- Jane Talbot (West Bromwich resident whose mother worked at K&J from 1945-58)

K&J employed thousands of workers from West Bromwich and the surrounding areas during its tenure. It employed multiple generations of families who depended upon it for their livelihoods. It has had a lasting impact on West Bromwich and the geography of the town itself. Uniquely, K&J’s vast factory, which covered 13,940 square feet, was in the centre of West Bromwich, rather than being located on an industrial estate, with another local factory in Lyndon. It was officially established in 1878, by John Arthur Kenrick, the son of Archibald Kenrick (who founded the iron foundry Kenrick and Sons), and a Director of Lloyds Bank, and Frederick Jefferson who was a solicitor’s clerk. Throughout its history, K&J was directed by members of these two families, often promoting itself as a ‘family run business’.

Referred to as the ‘K&J Family’ or ‘The House of K&J’, it was a private limited company with ownership equally divided between the two founding families and there were no non-family main board directors until 1966. Ownership was passed down to other (male) family members and the firm was a classic example of a paternalistic employer, strictly hierarchical within, and between, departments. ‘Proprietorial dynasties’ or members of the families or the were typically known as ‘Mr Fred’, ‘Mr Tom’ and so on. Clubs and societies, recreational facilities and canteens were provided for staff.

Between 1995-99, the firm began to sell off the company piece by piece. Its main factory which had been added to from the 1880s to the 1970s, stood empty and by the autumn of 2001 it had been demolished, all except for the front facade, which is listed and remains on West Bromwich high street. This building has been unoccupied since its closure and is currently owned by a private development company with plans to turn it into flats from 2023.

Whilst not unique to West Bromwich, many post-industrial towns and cities in the UK were historically dominated by

particular trades or industries which would employ thousands of people locally, alongside providing custom and business for shops and companies in the area. These firms or manufacturers were often owned and run by a small minority of wealthy business owners who had benefited from Britain's Empire and colonialism. Commonly these businesses were family run and passed down through family members. The sites where these businesses were established were often chosen for their material resources, atmospheric conditions and transport links. The owners had the resources to build not only their businesses but parks, schools and housing (often these were named after them). They had the power and the capital to completely reshape local communities, the geographies and infrastructures of the town, which all impacted upon local people's health, livelihoods and their educational prospects. They had the power to enable a town to prosper or to decline.

It is an effect felt in many deindustrialised areas today where the absence of these firms are acutely felt on struggling high streets. It should not be left to the benevolence of big business to shape a community and the spaces we inhabit or 'inherit'. Often these sites still remain privately owned; their use dictated by their owners. When these companies close, they leave a gaping hole in the community. However,

there are arguments to be made that if these companies were established or run differently, for example, as a co-operative and owned by the workers rather than through family dynasties, then the form and the future of these companies and sites may have been different.

During the period in which K&J was in business, there was often the narrative that staff had the option to leave if unsatisfied as a worker. That you 'could walk from one job to another' in the same week because there was an 'abundance' of alternative options for employment. Ownership structures were similar at many companies and the Kenrick family owned and ran multiple businesses in the Midlands, beyond K&J. This 'abundance' of the job market and the quality of well paid jobs available, was also only open to certain groups and the informality of employment practices, with people often gaining work through family or friend connections. This created further barriers for, and excluded, other groups of people, particularly those from Black and Asian backgrounds. The legal protections workers had were also limited and legalities around unfair dismissal in the UK - particularly when workers became pregnant - did not become unlawful until the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Ultimately, the legacy of K&J is not the products made or even the sites built and demolished. It is the relationships and friendships that were formed and have transcended the workplace and its localities. Through friendship and community spaces were created by, and for, the workers for sociality inside and outside of work for laughter or even small acts of mischief!

TESTIMONIES

From January to June 2023, we spoke to a cross section of women workers at K&J who worked there between 1960 to 1995. We also interviewed family members of workers who were employed there from the 1940s onwards. This is only a small number of testimonies and encompasses only their experiences; it is not intended to be a definitive picture of women's working lives at K&J.

The interviews were conducted in person with Sophie Huckfield and Jess Piette or over the telephone. Consent has been given by participants and the interviews have been edited by Sophie and Multistory and shared with participants prior to publication.

All efforts have been made to ensure the interviews have remained written as spoken, in respect to the local dialect.



OLIVE

Olive Timmins was born and grew up in Oldbury and worked at K&J between 1960 to 1972. She began working as an Order Department Junior and eventually became Secretary to the Chairman, Mr. Peter Kenrick.

Olive

I need to tell you that a lot of people don't realise that in them days, once you got married and had a child, you didn't go back to work. As you probably found out there wasn't maternity leave and your job is there at the end. You finished and that was it, your working life was practically over. Unless you could get a part-time job of an evening and the husband stopped at home with the kids. So consequently, they did have a night shift or an evening shift there at one time, but I don't know too much about the production side because I was there as a Junior Clerk. I went to college; I went to a secondary modern school. They didn't have comprehensive schools then, they had grammar schools but you'd got to really have the money to go to grammar school. Not so much your education, it's the money side of it. My sister went to grammar school but I don't think that my dad could afford for me to go.

I started at 16 as an Order Department Junior. To go back to the beginning, when I went to my interview, I was

accepted. So I used to catch the number 16 and it came right to K&J.

The day I started, there was two sisters, another girl and me; we all started together, three girls went into the Order Department and the other girl went on the factory floor in the Dispatch Department. We stayed friends for over 50 years. In fact, the year before Covid, all three of them died the same year. But we actually went out for a meal for our 50th anniversary of the day we started K&J, which was 8th August 1960.

For the first month, us three girls went in the office, which was on the first floor. All we did was the filing. That's all we did, file. I would make cups of tea for the other women that was a bit higher up in the department. The department had got men and women and in that department, there was also what they called 'pen proof'. Now pen proof was if a customer came and wanted some letterheads but they wanted the company to design a motif or a logo on their behalf. Then the 'Pen Proof Girls' - and they

were nearly all girls in Pen Proof - they came up with the ideas and they did the actual prototype for the logo.

I was in that department for two years but I didn't want to stop in that department. I wanted to get down to the Directors' Corridor. I've always been very ambitious and found out that [Peter Kenrick's] secretary was expecting a baby and I thought 'yes! I can get in here'. However, a secretary from secretarial college was brought in and I thought 'oh that's had it'.

I keep looking out here because you can see K&J (she gestures to the window, where we are interviewing at West Bromwich Town Hall). You know, where there's a bay window? Well, now the Directors' Corridor is still all those front windows. On the first floor, below it, was one of the printing press rooms but where that bay window is, was the Chairman's Office. And then that way, from the bay window, was what they call the Directors' Corridor. It was very prim and proper. Anyway, this secretary that they brought in from the secretarial college couldn't do the job. Because K&J's had its own way of working. And the main thing is that, because I'd done a year at college, doing shorthand and typing and English and maths and, of course, you learned all the grammar for English, or tried

to. K&J didn't use full stops, because they said it would ruin the typewriter.

You would add two spaces instead of one. You would still use the grammar and use the commas and the capital letters but no full stops. Anyway this secretary was sacked. So I went to see my boss, which was the Order Department boss. Who said, 'you're needed down the Directors' Corridor, Mr. Peter Kendrick wants to see you'. I was frightened stiff, because when he came into our department, if there was a complaint they'd sent for me to put down in shorthand the letter he was gonna send to the customer, I'd have to type it. Then next time he'd come into the Order Department he'd sign it.

So I went and Mr Peter Kenrick had this big old fashioned desk and he sat opposite me and he wore his glasses on the end of his nose like this (she pulls her glasses down to the end of her nose). And he said 'sit down', so I did, and he said 'would you like to work for me?'. And I looked at him and said 'well you've already got a secretary'. And he says, 'well she's not suitable, we're sending her downstairs until she can get herself another job. And you've done work for me in the Order Department. Would you like to work for me?'. And I said, 'I don't know' and he said, 'well do you think we'd get

on?' I said 'no' and he said 'why?'; I said 'well you can't spell and neither can I'. And he looked at the end of his glasses and said, 'have you got a dictionary?' so I said 'yes' and he said 'well use it'!

And I was there for 12 years.

Well no, I was with K&J for 12 years and I was his secretary for nearly 10. After I got married, I was 26 and my husband was eight years older than me, so we didn't want to wait to have children. [Peter Kenrick's] wife phoned me up and said 'can you delay having a family, the gaffer's only got another four years to do, we'd rather you stop and keep with you' and I said 'I'm very sorry, but we ain't got time', because Bill was 34. But she treated me like a daughter and when I had my twins, I was in Dudley Road Hospital. They sent me a basket of fruit; now who would send someone a basket of fruit to a flippin hospital, to a normal person like me?

When I had the twins, I lived in a multistorey block of flats in Smethwick, on the third floor. Everybody was hanging out of the windows when I got home from the hospital and on the car park below there was a big van from Harrods who delivered to me - which I've still got - a baby basket. And it was also a sewing basket but you could use it as a baby basket to start with and then turn it into a sewing basket and it was

all done in canework. And it's absolutely beautiful.

When I was leaving and I gave my notice in, what I wrote in the letter was 'I'm very sorry I have to give you notice, I've got a new job, one with more responsibility'. And then I put, 'I'm going to be a parent'. Anyway, when I was leaving, he [Peter Kenrick] said, 'what would you like as a leaving present?'. So I asked for a reference because I knew that I wouldn't be going back to that job. And I thought in years to come, I might want a job. And I've heard other people say, but where are we gonna get a reference from? You know, who had left work years ago. So I asked him for a reference, which I've still got. And he said, 'no, what would you like?', and I knew they got plenty of money and all the rest of it, so I asked for a sewing box.

So that was the start of my career. Well start and the end of my career at K&J. Over the years, lots and lots of things happened. But one that I thought would be interesting for you is where they lived. Before I get into that, the Directors were not called by their surnames. It wasn't Mr. Kenrick, it was always Mr. Peter, Mr. Ken, Mr. Jeff, Mr. Tom, and Mr. Hugh. That was the five Directors. Mr. Jeffrey retired a long time before the others... but they had got offices up in the Directors'

corridor. Anyway, Mr. Ken was the accountant. Do you know about Lyndon?

It was part of the factory, the envelope factory. K&J did envelopes, all sorts and sizes and it is no longer there now, there's flats there now. But when the Chairman passed away, he [Peter Kenrick] was Chairman of the company. And a lot of the stuff I did was private stuff, even to the fact that the very first job I had was to order him a pair of plus fours. You know what plus fours are? No? Neither did I!

He went shooting in Scotland every year. And he got a tailor in Scotland who he ordered his plus fours from. They are trousers. That was my first job for him and I had not got the slightest idea what I was doing. He [Peter Kenrick] had also got a stream going through his property. I couldn't understand this, but because he liked fishing, as well as shooting... So they brought some fish to stick in the stream. They ain't gonna stop in the same place am they? So why buy fish to stick in your stream? I never understood that one.

But it was, I mean, when you think I was just an ordinary girl - working class - I didn't know. He used to do the pools every week. Put 50 pence on. And every Monday morning he'd come in and say, 'have I won the pools this week?', and I

used to check the pools at home every week...I had to get the Financial Times every morning and check his shares to find out whether they was going up or going down. I used to have to go to Tesco to fetch his cigarettes. Although his wife didn't want him to smoke.

Sophie
Would you tell her?

Olive
Oh she knew!

Sophie
So you mentioned that you were also part of the 'Girls Corner' for this (holds publication up). Did this come out every year or quarterly?

Olive
Each season: spring, summer, autumn, winter.

Sophie
And you edited the Girls Corner? What was that? Was that just about the women that worked at K&J?

Olive
Anybody could send a note: 'can you congratulate so and so'; 'so and so's getting married'; 'so and so's happened'. And that went into the Girl's Corner.

Sophie
How many women do you think worked in K&J? Was it female dominated?

Olive
No, because the press, the actual printing presses was done by the men and the fonts were mainly done by the men. But there were a lot of women. I couldn't tell you actually how many, which was because I was a private secretary and things had to be confidential. It was frowned upon, for me to have friends on the factory floor and in the offices.

Sophie
So you had to stay quite separate from everyone?

Olive
I was told off a couple of times. But you see these three girls I started with and have always been friends with. I was told off, mainly by the senior secretaries. They didn't like me because I was young. And they were all old. And when I was getting married, they were quite cut up. We don't have secretaries who are getting married. They was all spinsters. The main two had not got married, Miss Gill and Miss Armstrong. No, it was a career.

Sophie
And do you think they'd chosen a career instead? Do you think that would have been a purposeful choice?

Olive
I really don't know. I really think it was because they had got elderly parents, and they was looking after them. Because to be honest, I couldn't get

too close to them. You know, you couldn't gossip. And this is why they didn't want me to go into the offices, in case I said something that was going on down the Directors' Corridor...

I'm a very strong person and nobody dictates to me. When I was working for him, Peter Kenrick, he asked me to go to elocution lessons. Because he kept saying. 'A bit of Black Country coming through there. Would you consider going to elocution lessons?' I says 'You must be joking. With two brothers and a boyfriend, my life wouldn't be worth living at home!' I said that. But what a cheek!

And the other thing was, if we had visitors, as we very often did. Well there was a director from Hope's come over. He used to come to lunch quite often. And they'd got their own dining room the Directors had. K&J also had its own canteen, brilliant canteen, anybody can go there of a lunchtime, the workers, you know? Anyway, the Directors would go in with the normal people, unless they'd got visitors. Well if they got visitors, of course it was a suit and waistcoat. One day he came in [Mr. Peter Kenrick] and said, 'I've got a little job for you today' - he says so and so's coming, so I've got to go and have lunch in the Directors' dining room. He said 'only my shirts have gone to the cleaners, come back with no

buttons on! Can you sew me a button on here?'. I had to sew a button on his flipping coat - while he was wearing it!

Sophie
How long did it take?

Olive
Not long, cus' I can sew! It must have happened quite regularly because in my desk there must have been a box with a needle, cotton and button... But, you know, because I was a private secretary, all these sorts of things I was expected to do and smile.

Sophie
Did you have a nice working relationship?

Olive
Oh it was a wonderful working relationship, absolutely wonderful. Another thing, Christmas. Oh, I was gonna tell you where he lived. He lived in a 10 acre plot. Blakeshall House which is in Wolverley... Anyway, the one year, it must have been before I had children. He said 'what kind of Christmas tree do you have?' and I said, 'well, a real one usually if I can get one'. He said, 'well come over Saturday and you can pick your own Christmas tree'.

So we went [to the property]; it had got a lodge at the front. And I think the cleaner lived there. A long drive to the front. Tennis courts. The actual house was marvellous.

Absolutely wonderful and he got a Christmas tree chopped down for us... When I was over at his house, I asked his son how many rooms had they got? And he said he never counted them, there was that many rooms...

Sophie
Do you think he trusted you?

Olive
Oh definitely. Absolutely. He was a wonderful bloke. I went to their golden wedding anniversary. And I'd got the children then. And I've still got the letters his wife sent me on how to bring up twins. She knew how much I'd helped her husband out at work. You know, I took a lot of pressure off him, with the job. And I think I made him laugh. You know, you need somebody to put a smile on your face occasionally.

We went to the Conservative 'do' the one year. And we weren't Conservatives. Far from it. And we're going back quite a few years. And my husband didn't want to go but he knew it was my job kinda thing and the gaffer had asked us to go. I think it was a dinner; I know there was a dance. And the raffle ticket was £1 each. Now when you think I was probably only getting £15 a month...

Sophie
That's quite high! £1! So when you got £15 a month, was it a good wage?

Olive
Well, that was. When we moved into the flat. I was probably on a higher wage then, I can't remember. But when I started I know it was £15 a month.

Sophie
And do you think in the town K&J was an attractive place to work?

Olive
Oh, yes. I bet you couldn't walk 10 metres without meeting somebody that worked at K&J. Now I go to the Baptist Church. And there isn't one person in there that doesn't know somebody that worked at K&J. They were the biggest employers of West Bromwich people...

There was a lot of women in the offices. But the men were the managers; there was no women managers. There was men in the Order Department that sorted out the orders, that kind of thing. But mainly, it was women in the Order Department and in the offices and on the factory floor. It could have been 50/50. But don't quote me on that, because I don't really know.

Sophie
What would you do for your anniversary date of starting at K&J?

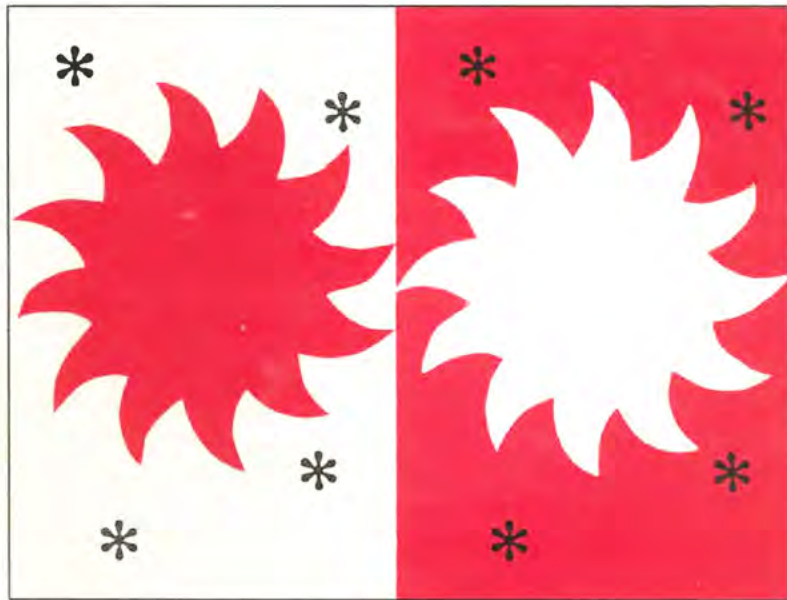
Olive
We'd go for a meal. Just the ladies! On the 8th August, the day we started at K&J in 1960.

Sophie
How would you define work?

Olive
Work is what you make it. My own personal opinion. You either enjoy it or you don't. But I think it's what you make it. You see, when I was that age working, at 16, you could walk in and out of a job anytime. That's what surprised me about us three, sticking it out at K&J. Because the working relationship was good. It was a family. You weren't a number, as most of them are today. You were valid. It doesn't matter whether you was a cleaner, and all the office cleaners were women, they were just as well thought of as the Directors. And I mean, they really was. And if you read some of the stuff in here (holds up K&J News booklet) you will find the people being appreciated. The staff being appreciated by the Directors.



NEWS



Summer 1971

Girls' Corner

Mrs. Olive Timmins recently left us to start her Childrens' Corner. We hope we haven't heard the last from her and that we shall receive a line from time to time. A few household hints, like how to remove egg stains from a carpet, or what to wear when pacing the floor at 3.00 a.m. Don't worry Olive, you won't know you're born until you get to the third. Over the past 2 years, Olive has built up the Girls' Corner and it's due to her 'persuasion' that it has grown into quite a corner of interest. Thank you. We see Olive pictured below, handing over her editorial rites to Miss Yvonne Beckett, Personnel, who is now going to undertake the duties of editing Girls' Corner.

Editor.



Olive (right) handing over Girls' Corner to Yvonne.

With Olive leaving, I have taken over the writing of Girls' Corner, so let's have a little support from you, by letting me know what you would like to see in our own special corner. We all like to be kept up-to-date with engagements, marriages and births, but there must also be a lot more 'girly' news we could share.

Engagements

Congratulations and very best wishes are extended to Miss Linda Stevenson (Die Stamping) and Mr. Philip Bates on the announcement of their engagement which was on Christmas Day, from all friends in Die Stamping and Paper Floors.

Congratulations to Mr. Colin Chappel—one of our London Salesmen—on the announcement of his engagement to Miss Wendy Howat (an ex-K&J girl at our London office).

To Miss Jean Callaghan (Accounts) and Mr. Roger Bates who became engaged on 28 January. Best wishes from friends in the Accounts Department.

Weddings

Sincere congratulations to Miss Hazel Edmunds (Production Statistics) and Mr. Ron Bullock (Electricians) on the occasion of their marriage on 14 January. Best wishes from all friends and colleagues.

Miss Colleen Davies became Mrs. Allen when she married John on 26 February, at St. Peters Church, Greets Green. Colleen wore a long white empire-line dress and was attended by 4 bridesmaids. All friends of Sets Division send you both their congratulations and very best wishes for your future happiness.



To Miss Ann Ewing (Binders) who became Mrs. Gilbert when she married John on 5 February. Ann and John were married at St. Andrews Church, Carters Green at 4.00 p.m.



04/21
L1508 P. 111-1111
WAGE PACKET FROM K&J

DEDUCTIONS		K&J POSITION		CLOCK NO.	
N.H.I.	3.2	TEA		421	
SOCIAL CLUB	6	NAT. SAVINGS			
OVERALLS		ADVANCE THIS WEEK			
CONV'T		ADVANCE LAST WEEK			
SAVE THE CHILDREN		UNQUOTED PENNANT			
		TAX	13.8		
		WAGE	11.187		
		BONUS	0		
		NET WAGE	9.15		
		PAYMENT	10.00		

TOTAL DEDUCTIONS 13.8

741/A 483 107284

CONTENTS OF THIS PACKET MUST BE CHECKED BEFORE LEAVING THE FACTORY

PATRICIA

Patricia Price grew up in West Bromwich. She worked as a Printer's Assistant in the Letterpress Department at K&J from 1962 to 1969. Both her mom and sister, Wendy Hood (as an Office Junior between 1967-72) worked at K&J.

Patricia

I worked in the Letterpress Department which was the bit, you know, where you see all the old windows? And I'm sure the gates to go in is where the entrance is now where you go into Marks & Spencers and that. I can remember walking in there anyway. But it was a mucky job, a mucky, mucky job, working in the Letterpress. Because everytime they changed the ink colour you'd gotta wash all the ink rollers and everything. It was really mucky. But I used to sit at the back of the machine and whatever they were printing would come out and occasionally you would check, because it was like. how can I describe it? It was like a square like that, with the raised, printing, you know letters? And occasionally a space with nothing on would rise up, and then of course you had to check if that'd risen up; you'd tell the man on the machine; there's a space come up and he would stop the machine and do it like, you know?

Yeah, I was only ever in there; I didn't go in any other department. But I can remember walking right through

the factory to the power place at the back. I mean it was a massive, massive big place really, when you think. Most of the paper, reams of paper, where if they'd run out of paper downstairs, you used to go up and get so many sheets and then bring it down and take it to the paper cutters. So I think that was upstairs? My sister, she's four years younger than me, she worked at the Envelope Factory down Lyndon. Yeah, near the hospital. She worked in the office there.

Sophie
When did you start?

Patricia

I think it was 1962 because I left school at 15. I was born in 1946, so I would have been 15 at the end of 1961. So it was probably January 1962 and then I worked until May 1969. And then I stopped work and I got married the year before. And then of course, I was having my first child then, in 1969. So that's when I left.

As I say, I found that out and when I got married this is what they did to me! (Held up

a photo, pictured.) That's what they did to people, you can't quite see it there. But on some of the notes they write like 'take a tip from someone who knows', tie your nightie to your toes' and 'when you get married and have twins, don't come to me for safety pins'. I can just remember them two... I can't remember how I got home, whether I went on the bus? Or whether someone picked me up or what. But when I got home, they shoved these paper punching things? Little holes from the Punching Department. They shoved it up me sleeves, pockets, everywhere! And I can remember me mom saying, 'get upstairs, stand in that bath, don't you take anything off down here!', because they just would fall all over the carpet. I can remember when I married, instead of throwing confetti a lot of it was the hole punches. But that's what they did to me anyway when I got married!

But yeah, what I did was, as I say, I used to sit at the back of the machine, the man, you had a man and a woman like, he would be concentrating on putting the ink on the rollers and making sure there was enough and that sort of thing. And this one day I was at the back of the machine, they were quite high, so you couldn't actually see the man. And I remember his name: he was Peter Wright. And he must have been doing something at the back where the rollers were and, all of a sudden, somebody shouted

and the machine stopped and he'd actually had his hand go down between the rollers. And they asked me, had I seen anything? But I couldn't see anything from where I worked. But I think he'd damaged his hand pretty badly and I think he was off for a bit.

There would be a woman to every machine you know. Or sometimes you perhaps did work two machines, but it wasn't very often. But there was usually a woman to every machine and oh god blimey, let me try and imagine it: there was about four near the office, which was behind us, where the Supervisor-Foreman used to be. And then there was some opposite there as well. And then over that way there was these great ones. You know so, I mean as I say it was a massive, a massive big place.

Sophie
And was the work you were doing be seen as skilled?

Patricia
Oh I dunno, not really I suppose, just manual really.

It was filthy. I mean, I used to have one of the old nylon overalls on and I mean, the ink and that. As I say you had to wash the old ink off the rollers - big rollers as well. With paraffin and that sort of thing; it weren't very pleasant. It was alright while you were sitting down, checking the work coming through but, as

I say, when you got to change the colour of the ink and that, that was when it was really messy. You'd come home and you'd be smelling of paraffin. You know, you could smell the paraffin on you from washing the rollers like. As I say, you had a laugh with the men. And they were all pretty pleasant. I can't remember anything that was nasty really, you know? But yeah, as you can see (gestures to an old pay cheque she has brought) you weren't paid an awful lot.

Sophie
So what would that be? Was that for your week's wages? (Looking at her old pay slip)

Patricia
Yes. £10, would be what I was taking home.

Sophie
What would be the equivalent, would you know now?

Patricia
God I dunno. Not that much, I mean suppose when you think in the 1960s, £10 was a lot really. I think I used to give me mom some money out of it...

We started about a quarter to eight in the morning and I think we went on to about quarter past 12. And then we was back on at one 'til about half four, or sometimes you do half an hour's overtime, which would take it up to five o'clock. And then sometimes you'd do a Saturday morning,

8 till 12 as well. You know, I mean you done a few hours. What's the average full time now? About 35 hours? You would do 40 plus sometimes, you know?

Because I can remember, I lived the other side of West Bromwich. I dunno if you remember where Menzies school was? Clarks Lane? No? Well sometimes I'd come to work on me bike and then I'd go home on it, quarter past 12, get home about - well it was about less than 10 minutes, less than a quarter of an hour. Gobble me dinner down and get on the bus to come back to work!

And on Christmas time they used to close what used to be the Gala baths round here. They closed it in the winter months, drained it, boarded it all over and used it for dances. And we're just working down there, you'd come get your tickets for either the Christmas Eve dance or the New Year's and the queue was around the block for the tickets. And then when I got married, I lived at Tividale; got two buses to catch to get to work. And then of course dinner time was doing shopping and what have you. So sometimes, if I'd done overtime, I didn't get back home until six o'clock and then got to get the tea done and everything.

Sophie
Did you get to talk much to the men in the factory?

Patricia

Oh yes, yeah, yeah, this is it. I can't remember any of them being...you know, what kind can I say? I can't even remember hearing a lot of swearing or anything in them days. They did treat you with respect? They didn't sort of look down on you, you know?

Sophie

What was it like working with the women? Would other departments talk to each other?

Patricia

I suppose so, the people that I knew that started at the same time as me, I think we were all mostly in the same department. So I can't remember any of my friends being in a different department. But if you went up, as I say, to get fresh paper if you'd run out and that, of course they would talk to you. Yeah, it was quite friendly, a friendly place as I remember. I mean you know in them days of course you could jump from one job to another. But I've never felt the need to leave, you know? Because I did enjoy it, apart from it being really mucky. I did enjoy it, the time that I had there and I met a lot of friends.

Sophie

So is that what most people did? They would go and work in a factory?

Patricia

If they hadn't got any qualifications and that, yes,

you hadn't really got any option really, I suppose, apart from if you were a bit more brave you'd go to night school and that sort of thing. But, I mean, I can't remember leaving school with anything; I mean, I didn't do any GCSEs or even CSEs, I just left at 15 and that was it. And I don't really know why I picked K&J. You just got to get a job when it was there. You know, just went and asked for a job and that was it.

Mom and dad always worked; dad worked for the council, mom did cleaning for people and she worked in a laundry. You know she always worked me mom did. Oh, you'd got to go get a job. You couldn't just laze about. I mean you had to pay, I was probably paying about 10 bob which is about 50 pence now is it? Towards me keep at home, out of me wages. You had to pay something...

I can remember going at Christmas to the Star and Garter, which was just over there and I started off on the vodkas. And how I got home? I mean I had to get on the bus; I don't know how I got home on the bus! Me mom wasn't too happy, I can tell you that. Because me dad worked for the council as well and he didn't usually drink but he must have gone and had a few with his friends and he drove home - how he drove home I dunno! So he was a bit three sheets to the wind, so me mom wasn't



Patricia dressed up for her wedding celebrations, 1968

very happy at all. But yes Christmases and that, I can remember we used to go to the Star and Garter.

I can remember going to the social club and there was dancing, as I say, at the Gala Baths and that. And at the Adelphi that used to be just around the corner...we used to go dancing there as well. I met me husband when I was 18 and we started to go out. So I wouldn't go to the social club then. I mean it's all pulled down now, it's not there anymore, But yeah, it was a place to go anyway and I can remember going.

Sophie
Because you were there for quite a long time as well. What made you want to stay because obviously like you're saying, you could go into one job and leave and go into another?

Patricia
Yes, you could leave and go into another. I don't know, I must have been happy doing what I was doing as you would just leave, you know?...I left school with no qualifications. So that was your option, factory work. I can remember coming up for a little interview, but I don't know exactly what I had to do, but I got put in the Letterpress Department anyway. And then, you know, you met a lot of new friends and I used to go out with them, or you could chat to them and that.. We didn't

have long for dinner. You know, you put your card in the thing. And I think if you were three, more than three minutes late, they used to knock a quarter of an hour off your time for just more than three minutes late. I mean the clock don't work now, that's sticking out on the front. But I would get off probably where the bigger door is now, where the Wetherspoons is, and you'd run around the corner and you'd look at that clock and it's just coming up to quarter to eight. Run! Because you didn't want to be late!

I can't remember being in a union as such. So perhaps women weren't allowed in? Because later on in life, I used to work on the home care. And I think I'd been working for quite a few years before they even brought a union up for you to join in that job? I mean I'm talking about 1970s-80s. So I wouldn't think that women actually were in a union in them days. I can't really remember people striking, you know as such. I can remember that the younger lads used to do an apprenticeship in them days. And they probably finished when they were 21 I think. And if it was the day that they'd finished, you used to bang, anything you could to make a noise on, you know, because they'd finished their apprenticeship. Yeah, which is a rare thing today. They don't do that sort of thing do they?

Sophie
Was it quite loud, the machines?

Patricia
Oh yeah. You didn't wear any earplugs or anything. Perhaps that's why the children tell me: 'mother you'm going deaf, you need a hearing test'. Alright I'll go for one! So I did!. I'm supposed to be moderately deaf in both ears but whether it was working down K&J, I don't know? But yes it was noisy, clatter, clatter, clatter, like this, as the rollers went over the printing face, so it was quite noisy. I suppose you had to shout a little bit. Perhaps that's why I shout nowadays?

You didn't have days off in them days so if you've been out the night before and got in early morning and then you'd got to get into work the next day, I was half asleep on the back of the machine. And if you didn't watch, it [the paper] used to pile up like in a little tray at the back, if you weren't fully awake, it'd start to clutter up at the back because you were supposed to take so much out at a time. And sometimes you used to have to count 'em. And then you'd stack 'em up and they'd keep coming through, you would do a few thousands sheets of paper at a time.

I don't think I ever worked right in the window. The width of that would have been

the width of the Letterpress Department. And then it went right, right back , probably the card factory. I know you could walk straight through over the street straight into the card factory. That's how big it was. I think behind the Letterpress Department was where they done all the typesetting. I can remember that. Above, I'm sure, is where they kept the reams of paper, great big thick, heavy reams of paper. And then you'd have another part where you'd bring that paper down and have it cut to a certain size. On a great, big blade it was, to cut the paper. If you'd have a few come through with an error on it; they'd be waste. So if you hadn't got enough paper at the end, you'd have to go and get some more to reprint them.

Sophie
Have you ever been in that building since you left? They are planning on turning it into flats.

Patricia
No,I haven't. You know, how they've done certain old buildings around the borough and put some in the Black Country Museum? They ought to take that frontage as it is and take it to the Museum, because I mean it's been there since what? 1800 and sommat? But yes, I think they ought to, you know, because I can see the clock; every time I look at the clock, I can see the time being quarter to eight in the

morning...

Sophie

What would you define as work, for you personally?

Patricia

A wage to live on because, I suppose you know, you've got to work to live. And that's it basically. I suppose there was the dole in them days but I never thought of signing on. You went to work to earn a living and that was it..

...yeah I've had a varied life I suppose. Always worked, apart for those few years with the girls growing up. Because my girls do too. Well, one has two jobs because she knows a second job helps her to get a bit of money to spend on luxuries and things like that like, you know? Yes, they've always worked as well.

Sophie

A lot of women have to give up their paid job to raise kids. Would you think that would be another form of work?

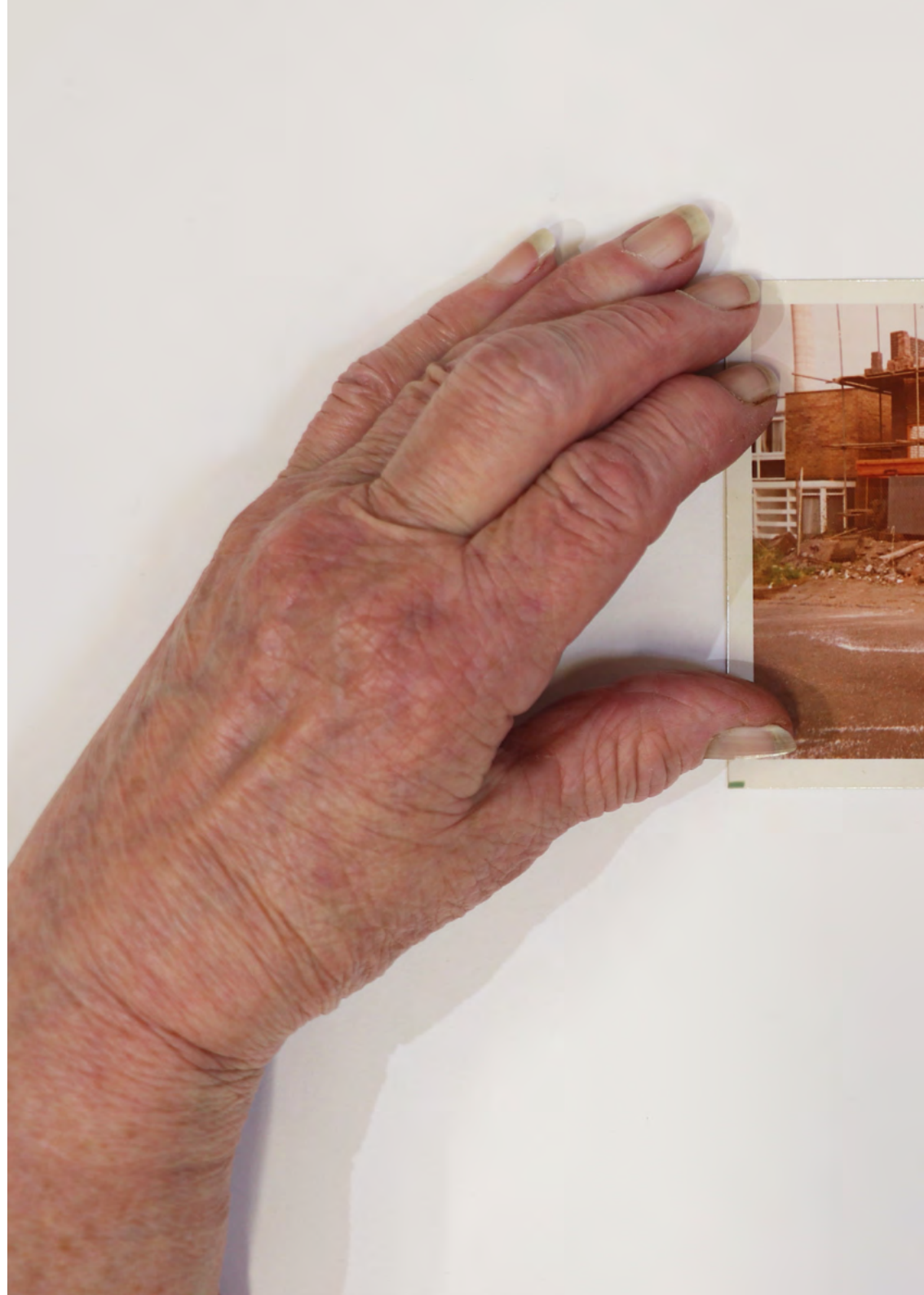
Patricia

Yeah, except it's unpaid like! Like yeah, it's a thing that most people that grew up in the 1960s did. Left school, went to work, eventually got married, had children, bought them up. Went back to work and then retired and then what do you do? Look after your grandchildren! But I did look after them when I retired. So it's just a continuous thing

isn't it really? But that's how you did it in then...That was it. It was a sort of trend. Trendy thing to do. Not like now, either you don't get married, or they live together or they leave it to their 30s before they settle down. Settling down was probably 20, 21 in them days.

We used to have a social life and family holidays if you could afford them, it's probably just a caravan or Butlins or something like that. But I mean that was all you could afford. I mean, my youngest was 16 before I went abroad, so I was in my 40s before I even went abroad on holiday, you know. You just couldn't afford it.

As I say, I mean, in a way you had to go back to work after you'd had your children to boost your husband's wages or provide the money for little luxuries. Yeah, I suppose the times were a bit tough. You didn't have a lot of money to throw around. You used to have HP- hire purchase, which you'd pay for so much a week because you couldn't afford to pay for things straight out.





DENISE

Denise Burton grew up in West Bromwich. She worked at K&J in the Payroll Department from 1978 to the 1990s. Both her mom and sister also worked at K&J.

Sophie

When did you start at K&J?

Denise

It was my first job and I was 17. Because I was gonna stay on at school and it was when the recession had started as well and I thought, just try and get a job and then, if not, I'd go back to school but I got a job and then they paid for me to go to night school.

I worked at K&J for about 19 years and then I moved over to Cannock and have been there ever since.

Sophie

What did you do at night school?

Denise

Bookkeeping. I think there's Maths and English in it as well.

Sophie

And they paid for that, K&J?

Denise

Yeah. And then I did a payroll diploma.

Sophie

Wow, so what year did you start?

Denise

I think it was 1977 when I left school, so I probably started in 1978, and was there for years really.

When I first started there, I was just in the Post Room. I think it was sommat ridiculous, like I can't even remember how much I was on when I first started. It was really low. Just opening the post. But you got to know everybody, as well, so that was good and I did that for about a year. And then one day, as it happens with almost all payroll people, you get shoved in there to help out and then that's your life then.. I think they was short, or someone was ill or something, and I was just sent to go in there for a month or two and then I just never came out!

Sophie

And so have you kept in touch with people?

Denise

Oh, god yeah. There is still four of us that meet up every month; we go for a meal and have a chat.

Sophie

That's so nice. So where are these people that you worked in Payroll with?

Denise

The one girl Claire, I persuaded my boss to take her on because we interviewed her. She came as a 17 year old and I've been friends with her ever since.

The job was ok. It was the people. But most people will say that. They stayed there for years because of the people, you had such good friends there. It was a nice place to work. The management was strict but it was a real nice place to work. Just everybody's friendly. Everybody looked out for one another. It was nice. You enjoyed going to work.

Just like everybody was friends, do you know what I mean? Of a lunchtime, every Friday, about 10 of us would all go round the pub, out the office. You know, if you needed anything, you knew, anyone would help you out.

I tell you what, I haven't been back to West Brom for years. And when we went, I was absolutely shocked. I was really shocked because all the new shops and the high street's totally different isn't it? It's better, there's more shops, more decent shops. Yeah, it's just totally different. I got lost!

Sophie

Have you gone past the K&J building recently? What do you think about it?

Denise

Yeah, sad. I don't think they've done anything with it have they? I think it's all still boarded up. Is Lloyds Bank still next door to it?

Sophie

Yeah, I think so. Is that where you would cash in your paycheck?

Denise

We used to - it was ridiculous. I think it was because of insurance purposes because our payroll office was on the second floor. There was a gateway and then Lloyds Bank and the performance to get the money - you just wouldn't believe. We used to have like the Payroll Manager hanging out the window with a case and a rope sending the rope down for them to put the money in and send it back up. It was ridiculous. But, you know, that's what we used to do.

Sophie

So they would pass the money through the window! Like in cash?

Denise

Yeah, through the window of the bank, because the bank came onto the back of K&J. We'd hang the rope from our window with this lockable box on. And that used to be sent across. And

then they'd have someone walk at the other end, they'd grab the box, fill it up and then send it back. And then about four of the accountants would go out to the front door and go round to the bank... But the money never went through the front of the building.

Sophie

Was it quite social? Did you ever mix with other departments?

Denise

Well there was four of us (in Payroll). And then the Financial Accountant was in front of us. And outside, would be all the accounts, like Purchase Ledger and Credit Control and all that. Everybody used to come in and have chats and stuff.

Sophie

Was Payroll the sort of place where they'd come to gossip?

Denise

Yeah!

Sophie

Did you always know what was sort of going on?

Denise

More or less (laughs).

Sophie

So you know about all the scandals over the years?

Denise

Oh god yeah! We knew all the girls in the factory because

they'd have clerks in the factory that would bring the clock cards up to us. So you'd sit and chat to them. Do you know what I mean? So you got to know everything that was going on really.

Sophie

So did you work alongside your friends? Is that who you meet up with now?

Denise

Oh yeah, it's just really like the people that used to work on our floor really. Like there's a girl who lives now in Rugby, she comes over occasionally. And then another girl lives in Manchester, we keep in touch with her.

We used to be doing stuff all the time. You know we'd go and play badminton a couple of times a week with people outside the office and then people would get to know that we were doing so they used to come as well. We used to do all sorts. We used to have trips out and we organised stuff for us to do, went canoeing. We used to get for meals and to nightclubs

Sophie

What nightclub would you go to?

Denise

Ones in Birmingham? I can't even remember the names!

Sophie

Was it Snobs?

Denise
I've been to Snobs yes! I think we ended up in Trisines once, that's where they used to let all the little kids go from school. And I was in the queue. And Deb, who worked in accounting, these lads that she knew came and they were all 10 years younger than me and they all got in. And because I was standing next to this lad who looked like he was 15, they wouldn't let me in!

Sophie
So I guess you sort of grew up at K&J? Starting at 17, were a lot of other people that worked with you, a similar sort of age range?

Denise
It was varied. In our office they were older than me until Claire came and then she was younger. But like, my boss seemed always like loads older. And then he left and I was made supervisor and that's as far as I got then.

I don't think they used to push the women as much as the men. Do you know what I mean? There always seemed to be more courses and stuff for the men to go on. Especially in the offices. I mean they sent me to college like probably when I got to about 22 or sommat like that. I did a diploma and they paid for all of that which was a few thousand at the time. It's that they didn't seem to like push you to it, do you know what I mean? There was

definitely more male managers than women.

As a woman, you used to have to push yourself forward. To go on courses and whatever, I had to ask for mine

Sophie
From looking at the archives, there were lots of examples of women who when they were getting married or turning 21 they would dress people up. Did that happen to you?

Denise
Yeah. They used to make you a book as well! I had to put a veil on. My sister, because she worked in the factory for a little while. when she got married they put her in the big paper bins and wheeled her around! [the factory]

I got married when I was 20. I remember getting engaged and everybody used to bring like sandwiches in and stuff like that. And they all used to have a whip round for everybody to buy a present. I think I had a china tea set, from Smith's that used to be in West Brom.

Sophie
Was that quite regular the whip rounds?

Denise
Yeah, we used to get fed up with it! (laughs). Somebody's leaving, somebody's having a baby! It was something all the time to be honest.

I haven't thought about K&J in a long time. Everytime we used to go out (with friends from K&J), that's all we used to talk about. But as the years have gone on, we've all had kids. You get into different things, don't ya? I remember once we went on a canoeing trip. That was all of Accounts and some of the blokes in the factory came with us. And we'd all got tins of beer. And our friend Deb came sailing past us and there was a lot of currents in the water. She hit a tree and flipped over and was absolutely soaking wet; she was screaming her head off. And then the next minute, she stood up and it was only up to her waist! That was funny. I reckon there was probably like 20 of us. At least once a month, we'd do something. Friday nights we used to go to the pub. It used to be at the Four In Hand. You know that one by the hospital? That's gone now though I think.

Sophie
So you'd all go to the pub on a Friday?

Denise
Yeah. We'd end up in the Star and Garter and we'd always end up singing Queen songs at the end. How sad is that?!

Sophie
No, it's amazing! I think it's so nice. Was it all people from K&J in the pub?

Denise
Yeah. You'd have other people

in there as well. But there would always be somebody from K&J.

Sophie
Did you have other family members that worked at K&J?

Denise
My mom used to work at the Envelope Factory, you know on Grafton Lane? She died when she was 58. She always used to say, when I retire, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that... But she never got there.

Sophie
Yeah, no, that happened to my parents as well. Yeah, I think there's a lot of things like that where you know, you're waiting for retirement and sometimes it doesn't come.

Denise
Mom must have been [at K&J] like 20 odd years. She worked on the machines and she used to work nights as well. It was quite good there really, because they used to do four nights and then they'd have like three days off because they'd have the weekend and the Friday as well. She used to work - what do they call it - twilighting - 5 til 9.

Sophie
That must have been a lot with raising you as well?

Denise
Yeah and then I think she had a row with one of the bosses once and left. Then got herself a

job at Sainsbury's in West Brom in the town centre.

K&J was always, like, you know, she might have asked to have some time off and they said no or something. Ridiculous, it was something daft. But she'd had enough, so she left. But she did go back. I think she only stayed at Sainsbury's a couple of years. Because they kept begging her to go back.

Sophie

Oh, really? So they wanted her to come back? And did your mom have many friends at K&J?

Denise

Yeah loads, they was all like a little family really. Everybody knew everybody.

Sophie

It's amazing how many people I've spoken to and they are like, 'my parents worked there' or 'my grandparents worked there as well'.

Denise

And like with me working in payroll, you could see the generations of families working there.

Sophie

So when you were sorting the pay packets, you'd see different family members?

Denise

Yeah, it was more the time cards. They used to have to fill their time cards in and we'd have to work them out every

week and you'd see the people to sort it out. So you knew the names and you knew the people as well because when they got paid - the actual pay slips - we used to have to take 'em down on a Friday. And that was nice because it was like a bit of a doss day. It would be like talking to everybody! Sounds like I never did anything, but I did! (laughs)

You used to have to take each little section to each of the managers and you'd have a chat with them. And then the girls that were the Clerks worked down on the factory floor and we used to go and talk to them. Because, you know, if there's any problems with the clock cards and that you'd have to get back to them to sort it out, you know if they clocked out wrong or something.

Sophie

And did anybody ever try to unionise?

Denise

No, not the office staff. They had NGA and the printing unions down in the factory.

Sophie

Was there ever any strikes or anything?

Denise

Yeah, I remember them being a strike. And it was the NGA that, they were the stronger union. And I remember them having a coal fire outside and they was all like picketing.

And we had to go in and you'm like walking past, but they were calling you scabs, but laughing, do you know what I mean? Yeah. It didn't get nasty, but we had to walk through, go through the picket line.

Sophie

And was it mainly men that were striking, but not the women?

Denise

Yes and the men were on lots more money than the women.

Sophie

Did you know if there were many women in the print side?

Denise

Not as managers and stuff. I mean, they all worked on the print machines. But it was the ones that ran the machines - the management - the ones that ran the actual machines, the men did that.

They didn't strike very often to be honest. I can only remember a couple of times. There was another union for other workers but I don't think it was a very good one. I can't remember what it was called now.

Sophie

What made you leave K&J? Was there a specific reason?

Denise

They didn't pay high wages but it was a reasonable wage, and I think everybody enjoyed being

there and working there. I'd been there 19 years. I had Joe late; I was 34 when I had him.

So I'd worked there for bloody donkey's years. I never used to have much time off. Probably did have a little off, never used to be a lot. And then my son was quite poorly and he had an asthma attack. And I mean, they was really good to me when it was time to get the doctor's note, they said they'd pay me. I was actually in the hospital with him for a week. And he was really poorly. Anyway, when I'm back to work, I have an interview with the HR Director. And he really got up my nose. Because he was saying to me, if this happened again, what would you do? And I says exactly the same. I'd have the time off. Because they was saying I shouldn't have had the week off. But he was really poorly. That got my bee in my bonnet. So I did look for somewhere else.

Some of the management that came in a bit later. They weren't so nice, to be honest. You know like that HR Director? I mean, the questions he was asking, I felt really bad. Like yeah, if I'd been having lots of time off throughout the years I'd been there, then OK. I mean, he did apologise to me afterwards and everything. He said, you know, don't leave on account of that. But I'd had enough by then. And plus the salary was like twice the amount in my new job.

If you did some overtime or something you could have the time off. Say if you wanted a couple of hours off. You used to have to sneak out of the office and not let anybody see. That was the mentality.

I was a bit put out [(by K&J)] to be honest - so I decided to go look for another job and I went to another company and the bloody salary difference was amazing, I don't think they even paid fantastic wages! But I think I went from something from about £14,000 to about 20 odd.

It was a supervisor role at a big payroll company. And we had our own section, I used to do the payroll for Dollond & Aitchison, remember the glasses people?

Sophie
So the £14,000? Was that the highest that you reached at K&J after working there so long?

Denise
I think it was, to be honest!

Sophie
So it wasn't very flexible to work there? Say if you needed to pick your kids up or drop them off, for example, would K&J accommodate for that?

Denise
Oh god no. That's why when I got the opportunity to set up my business, that's what I did. And to be honest, I did that from when Joe was four. And

then it was brilliant. I could just get to the school whenever I wanted and it was totally different.

Sophie
Do you prefer working for yourself?

Denise
Yeah. Well, if I was younger, probably not; do you know what I mean? I don't regret working at K&J because of all the people that I know. Whereas working for yourself you get to know people that you're dealing with. God when I think back, I must have had 150 companies I was dealing with. And I've made friends on the phone with quite a few different women over the years but it isn't the same as physically working with them, is it?

But then I had the opportunity to go down to the school, so I met mothers on the playground, I've got a couple of good friends from that. So it's different ways of working, isn't it?

Sophie
Completely. And do you feel like, because I spoke to a lot of women, most of whom actually left K&J once they had kids, that it was almost the expectation that you wouldn't go back?

Denise
Yeah, that was a bit of the mentality really. That did change a little bit, I think.

Say 20 years before me, I think as soon as they got pregnant, that would be it. But you know, like our generation, women would have babies and had to go back to work.

Sophie
What does work mean to you?

Denise
It just gives you a purpose doesn't it? Just to get up and get you out of bed. I keep moaning and saying I want to retire and all this lot, but I am sort of winding it down to be honest. I mean I've worked since I was 14 because I used to do Saturday jobs and stuff. So I've always worked and I can't see me not working. I'm 62 now, so I'm gonna have to pack it in at some stage!

Sophie
What do you think you would do outside of work?

Denise
I don't know really! Because my husband always says that to me: 'you've got no hobbies', and I say 'I got no hobbies because I don't have any time for them!'. Because we brought our granddaughter up as well. Because my stepdaughter now is in a really good relationship but she wasn't when she had a baby, so we brought her up til she was about five.

Sophie
You know, obviously, from your time at K&J and reflecting on that, what do you think your

working life has given you?

Denise
We've always had nice holidays, we've had our own property, by both of us [her husband] working... But it's the friends more than anything, I think. I mean I'm meeting them all this Thursday!



Photos of the Star and Garter pub.



KAREN

Karen Radburn grew up in West Bromwich and worked as an Audio Secretary and in Personnel at K&J between 1979 to 1982. Her mom also worked there during the 1940s and multiple cousins during the late 1970s.

Karen

I'm sure you spoke to many people, but there was a saying in West Brom - for a long, long time, 'If you didn't work at K&J, you knew someone that did'.

And although I wasn't there for that long -two, nearly three years - I was a young girl myself then. But my mother worked there when she was a young girl back in the - when would it have been - early 1940s, mid '40s? You know, after the war.

Sophie

I'd love to know what your history is with K&J and what you did there, like you said, your mom worked there and you worked there?

Karen

The story. I mean, I ain't got my mom no more, bless her. But she was one of the postwar working women, you know, you left school and you got a job. And she went to work at K&J, and she told us when we were kids that she didn't like it, because she was just reading to an old man. So actually, in my mind, I thought she sat and read books for an old man; I'd got no concept of work then,

I was probably eight or nine years old. She would have been a proofreader but she actually left because she was a young woman and she was in this little back office, with this older man, who was probably in his 40s or 50s. But my mom was only in her teens. So that to her was very boring. Just makes me smile now when I think about how I misunderstood it. You know, the narrative of her sitting in an office, reading to an old man who was in a care home. When actually she was probably training as a proofreader for the printing part of the business. But yeah, so she didn't stay very long. She went to work in the factory, the Dart Spring, which is another place of industry in West Bromwich now long gone. That was my mom's story. I went there. Do you want me to just carry on?

Sophie

Yeah, this is great. This is really interesting. What's interesting is that all the women that we've met, everybody had a different job! Like, I didn't realise that people would proofread in that way. Those must have been very early days.

Karen

Oh I imagine so! And to her, it probably did feel like she was just reading to an old man. But when I went to work there all those years later, my mom was still obviously with us then because I was only in my late teens myself. And she said, 'oh, yeah, I went there, I didn't like it, I was bored; you'll be bored'. You know, this is how you pass on the advice to the next generation, I wasn't going there to read to an old man! I was going there to be a - I'll always remember the job advert; it was in the Express and Star, as it used to be in those days. It was to be a secretary and it would be helpful if you spoke either fluent German or French. I did neither, I struggled to speak English sometimes! But I was also registered with a Pertemps probably, you know, a job agency? It had gone to them as well. And they said they would get in touch when a job comes up. I think I'd seen that [ad] about the German or French. And they [temp agency] said, 'oh, no, they're just a bit pretentious like that; you probably don't need it'. Anyway they sent me for the interview and I got the job and I never once needed to speak German or French!

Sophie

Yeah, what a weird request?

Karen

But they were trying to 'up the game' in the advert, to stop

the dress from applying. But it was a bit of a grand title: 'Audio Secretary'. I worked in the typing pool as a typist and the office was along the Directors' Corridor and, there were four women in the office. The Supervisor was a fabulous lady named Molly Downes and she was probably in her 40s then, and I was 19. There was another lady named Maureen Sheldon who was in her 40s too. And the other girl, was a girl I'd grown up on the same estate with, who is married now, I already knew her. But I didn't know that before I got the job.

In the office next door was Mr. Hugh Jefferson and I think he was titled 'Director of Industrial Relations' or something. Next to him was Mr. Tom Jefferson. He was the MD of course, and next to him was his secretary's office: Jane was a lovely girl. And then at the end of the corridor was the Finance Director, Mr. Ray Dickinson and he was a proper gentleman. In our job we did all the typing for all the Business Units; they'd come through on audio tapes and we'd spool them up on the word processors. Oh, my god. I mean, they were state of the art at the time, 'Golf Ball' word processors with floppy disks the size of an old fashioned seven inch single. And we just typed all day.

The trays at the front of Molly's desk had labels of names on them: Mr. Tom, Mr.

Hugh, Mr. Dickinson and the Marketing Director, who was rarely there. I didn't realise that Mr. Tom and Mr. Hugh were both Mr. Jefferson. I thought they - Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Jefferson were the bosses and I didn't know who Mr. Tom or Mr. Hugh were? Until the day Mr. Tom's wife phoned up Jane, the secretary who was away from her desk, so the phone fed through to our office, and we picked it up. And she says, 'hello, this is Mrs. Tom'. The wife referred to herself as not Mrs. Jefferson, it was so bizarre. It took me a little while, probably days, to realise that Mr. Tom and Mr. Hugh were both the Mr. Jeffersons, but that was the way they differentiated.

So I worked in the typing pool and when Jane went on holiday it was my first direct contact with one particular Director and he wasn't a pleasant man. No. He was a very rude, very abrasive, very arrogant man. In fact, I was doing some typing - they would go to a fair, Germany or somewhere - and it was a list of event venues and stalls and things, I don't know. And he kept changing it and changing it and changing it and I kept retyping it and running it and retyping it. Anyway he called me into his office. Bear in mind, I was 19, 20, a bit thick, a bit green, a bit in awe of people who were, you know, the boss. And he says, 'look, something's gone very' - he was very

posh - 'something's gone very wrong here. You count up your events and I'll count up mine and we'll see if we get the same number'. So I'm counting through and my brains trying to work out what's gone wrong. And it clicked. It was one of the amendments or something.

And, without thinking, I just said 'oh ar, I know what happened'. He looked at me, curled his lip and said, 'oh ar? Oh ar? Go away and learn how to speak properly before you do any more work for me'. And I came out of his office and I stuck my two fingers up at him as I walked down the corridor, thinking, 'you absolute wazzock'. I live in West Brom! This is how we speak, you know? But he was very rude. Another Director, his cousin, he was a lot more sociable, a lot more gregarious. He was much more - he was still senior - but he was a nicer man; put it that way. Mr. Dickinson was lovely. I very rarely saw Mr. Simon, the Marketing Director. He'd occasionally fly down the corridor with his tie over his shoulder and disappear again for six months, so not quite sure about him.

Sophie

And what years were you there?

Karen

I'm working that out! I started there in 1979. And I left in 1982. Well, I was made redundant in 1982.

Sophie

So you worked in quite close contact with the bosses?

Karen

Well in close proximity, yes. Molly, who was our Supervisor, I mean, she took the brunt of that Director but she'd worked there a long time. And she knew how to handle him. She reported directly, as I remember, to Mr. Dickinson, the finance chap and she thought the world of him, he was a very kind, nice man. You know, he was a Director but he just called her in, you know, talked to her like a human being. That other Director did anything but that. His secretary, she was only in her 20s - and she could speak fluent French by the way! But, he was not a nice man. They had the NGA strike when I was there...and the place was - I didn't understand it - but we went down to a four day working week. And then we were oversubscribed in the typing pool, the Audio Secretary office for its proper title, and because I was the last one in, they moved me into Personnel to work with the Personnel Manager and the Training Manager.

The Personnel Manager, he was, in old fashioned language, he was a bully. He was a nasty little bully. I hated being there. He would have this approach. It was the Training Manager's job was to look after the apprentices on the shop floor and they were all male, there were no female

apprentices that I remember in those days. And of course, if they were falling behind or had any problems, they had to come and see the Training Manager and he was quite a nice chap. I mean, I would have been 21, he would have been in his mid-30s, but he actually cared about the apprentices and you know, getting them through their briefing, training, etc, as I remember it. I always remember one episode, there was a lad had been called up. He'd had a lot of time off; he was quite a big chap, you know.... very young, probably, the same age as me. And the Training Manager was talking to him about his attendance and the Personnel Manager came out and he just pulled up this kid and told him he was too fat to even wear the dungarees and to get out and lose weight. He was vile. For Personnel! It didn't get much better over the years, I can tell you! I turned around and you know, I just said 'you shouldn't be talking to him like that' and he said 'it's got nothing to do with you'. He also said to me, because I smoked in those days and you could smoke in the offices - can you believe such a crime existed? (laughs). And once, he did say to me: 'when you die, at a very early age of a horrible death from lung cancer, I will come and skip on your grave'. I'm not joking; he was a little treasure!

Sophie

Do you think a lot of people in the office had to put up with quite toxic behaviour? What was the strike? The NGA strike?

Karen

Oh yeah. There was a strike which affected all printers across the country. It was the union for printers.. And of course K&J were printers, business forms and greeting cards and stationery... And there was a big meeting down on the shop floor where - there was a lot of women who worked down on the shop floor as well as a lot of men who tended to do all the technical engineering stuff. And the women did all the packing and that kind of stuff. But the union had called for this big meeting. And one of the heads of the company went down. I wasn't there but we got told everything that went on. It got quite - what's the word - hostile, with the union and the Director lost his temper with them and said, 'well if you carry on playing this game' - I'm paraphrasing, but the narrative is still true - 'carry on playing this game, I'll just close the place down. I've got more money than you, I'll live quite comfortably'.

Hard to imagine when you see the workplaces today, how my generation appear to have to tiptoe around all the things that any single person would find offensive, but back then - different world - It was very male dominated. But yes, a lot

of women did work there and in the office actually. Although, I did meet my first husband there, funnily enough, and a lot of people did that too [at K&J]. Met their husbands and wives there!

But as a social kind of scientific study, it really was a place of its time and it's interesting to think how would it have survived in today's world? I don't think so. But I was made redundant from the Personnel Department because I couldn't cope working with the Manager and that was my first taste of being argumentative. I couldn't just sit there and watch him talk to people like they were something he was walking on. And because it had hit a bit of a hard time you know, the country had a hard time with strikes and recession and god knows what else. And I was really sad because I did like working there but not in Personnel because of the Manager.

All the senior jobs were men, definitely. The women I knew were all admin support or secretarial.

Sophie

Was it quite a social workplace?

Karen

Social place? Friendly. Oh my god, yeah. I remember one Christmas because obviously, you weren't allowed alcohol of course when they were working

on machinery. So a memo had gone around, I think we'd typed it, saying that the office staff couldn't have [alcoholic] drinks in the office because it wasn't fair that the shop floor staff couldn't. Bearing in mind the building was Victorian I think it was like an old school toilet, with loads of racks. And there was about 10 or 12 of us young girls. We'd all been in the town on the lunchtime, came back with our bottles of cider and we just hit the toilets.

My cousin also worked there, Gill. And I've got this very vivid memory of her and we've got a little radio in there. All our bosses knew we were in the toilets, they were just, you know, happy to let us have an hour. My cousin, who I didn't know worked there until I went to work there, for some reason was sitting in the sink with a bottle of beer - don't know what - singing into the radio and The Human League were in the charts at the time: Don't You Love Me Baby. But Gill was singing it Black Country version. 'Doh yo want me babby' at the top of her voice! So yeah, it was a very sociable, very friendly place.

As I say I met my husband there, I say husband, he wasn't then, he worked in greeting cards as a buyer for a while. Anyway, one day we were in our office and the old fashioned tape recorders that had got the old fashioned cassettes

ribbons that sort of came unspooled sometimes, mine had come unspooled and it was all over the place. And his name was Roy and he came in chasing up some estimates for typing or something. And after he'd walked out because, obviously, my face lit up when he came in, the women who I worked with said 'oh, that's a story you can tell your grandchildren one day, Karen; you know, there you were with your fingers all wrapped up in cassette tape and your husband walked in, their future granddad!', and I laughed. But we did end up married. Didn't last!

When I took redundancy my sister was getting married and I'd gone to meet up with the crowd from K&J. I wasn't working there anymore but it had only been a week or two. I just took the chance and I said, 'well, do you want to come to this wedding; free bar? - you know that would entice any bloke back in those days - and he says 'yeah can do' and he did. And we started dating and got married about 18 months later. Yeah. So I met him there.

But as I say, it was such a lot of people I would have been to school with that were there. That I didn't know were there until I worked there. I'm still friends with one of them to this day. She worked in Payroll, in the little corner office.

Sophie
So the Christmas party in the toilets, was that a common occurrence? So obviously it wasn't during work hours but that you were drinking?

Karen
Yeah it was in working hours! I know, a lot went on in working hours that was not work!

There was a little corner attic office that belonged to the Marketing Manager, really brilliant fella. Everybody called him Johnny boy, but of course he was Marketing. PR, so he was always off doing selling. It was a little attic office up the spiral staircase. And he was so rarely there. It was known as the 'nookie place'. Where if people who worked there wanted to have a bit of a tryst would go because you could block it and nobody ever went up there. One or two people did get caught in a love tryst, shall we say, they were with people who they were either married to or otherwise... Oh, yeah that went on during office hours. What else went on during office hours? Obviously the toilets at the Christmas party. I mean, there was a social scene outside of it as well with people just meeting up. We used to go over the Star and Garter at lunchtime and that kind of thing. That's no longer there.

You'd go to the pub on a lunch break. That was the scene in those days. Many places I've

worked before and since, you know, lunch hour was in the pub..

The memory I've just had was - and it's a very sad one actually. It was after I'd - no, I was still there - and there was a young apprentice and again, I forget his name. And he was such a nice looking lad. And he'd finished his apprenticeship and he went to Tenerife with friends to celebrate and very sadly, tragically, he got killed in a hit and run on the Island. It was horrendous. It was his 21st birthday; he'd passed his apprenticeship, he'd gone on holiday to celebrate, and he never came back. And K&J, for all I've just said about the male dominance and the arrogance you know, some of the toxic behaviours, they actually, on the day of his funeral, they requested that his procession was taken past K&J and they stopped the presses and, whoever could, walked and stood outside to watch the funeral procession go by. So it was that kind of family business as well. There was a toxic side but there was also a caring side where, you know, people were valued there. As long as it wasn't upsetting that Director or the Personnel Manager.

Sophie
And you were saying that you still have friends that worked there?

Karen

Yeah, I mean, a girl who worked in wages, she stayed a lot longer than me. She was there about 10-12 years, I think. And she left and she works for herself now. She's very successful - she does payroll for other people's businesses, has done for years. But we're still in touch. We were friends at school, had lost touch; I went to K&J and there she was. And then I left and she carried on. And we just got back in touch because of other means. I'm a dog groomer now and she brings her dog to me. So it never lets you go K&J; it never lets you go.

There was another one that popped in my head then. When I was married to Roy, now I'd left K&J at this point, but he still worked there as a buyer in the Greeting Cards division. And he was going on a business trip with Mr. Hugh and I had to drive him down to his house, which was Worcester somewhere. And my intention or my thought was that I'd just drop him off. But I didn't, they invited us into their country pile. And honestly, I'm there like a dimwit, mid-twenties. And Mrs. Hugh - I didn't know their real names! - Mrs. Hugh had this tea tray bought in with all different silver pots on it and told me 'I could be mother' to pour the tea. I didn't know which one to pick. I was shitting bricks. I was so socially inept. Couldn't wait to get out of the place.

I mean, they'd been very polite and pleasant. Totally out of my depth, this was a society I did not mix with. But Roy had to go to Sweden with Mr. Hugh for this fair of some sort. Oh, and it changed him. He was a funny bloke when he came back, it's why we didn't last. He went all well, he started to get ambition, I think. And he did stay a while longer but we were divorced by the time he left there; he became a policeman. But he actually had an affair with a lady in reception, who also was married at the time to a chap up in the offices. So, you know, K&J share there!

Sophie

So did you grow up in West Brom?

Karen

Yeah, I lived on Charlemont Farm Estate and we moved when I was about 14, 15. Mom and dad moved up to Great Barr and I was living in Great Barr when I was working at K&J, as I used to catch the bus to work. But I passed my driving test at 19 when I was at K&J, so I bought my first car when I worked there. But it really was, you know, such a - well I'm 62 now - and the memories are still very vivid you know? We did work, I know it sounds like we just had a party! I didn't really go down onto the shop floor when I worked in the Secretarial Department but when I moved into the Personnel Department, I had reason then to go down and pick up cards

and things like that. hey used to call it The Floors. And it was like the warehouse bit, where two of my cousins worked; cousins of the sister who was singing, 'Don't you want the baby' in the toilet sink. They worked on the shop floor, Liz and Ellen. And that's where they did a lot of the packing. And if I got the chance to go up there, I loved it, because a) I could get out of the office and b) I was on The Floors and because there's no real management up there, because it was just all women and they got the job done. But they could sit and gossip and smoke and drink tea and I stayed there for an hour with them. So I liked that bit. But yeah, it was a noisy place on the shop floors. Really noisy, and no one wore ear defenders or anything like that, like they would these days. You just had to go deaf.

Sophie

Was it your first job?

Karen

No, it wasn't. I'd left school in 1977, and I went on a, they called it - grand titles in those days - a 'Commercial Apprenticeship', which was an office job. But I worked there because when I went to college I learnt shorthand that no one uses any more; I'd already got typing but I was rubbish at shorthand!. And it was over in Oldbury, Accles & Pollock's, and that's gone now. I was there for about a year. And I

left there because it was - excuse my French - a bit of a ball ache to get the bus from Great Barr to Oldbury, it was two or three buses. And I got a job in West Brom at Kraft Foods and I stayed there for a year or so. And it was from there I went to K&J, which was the best bus route because it was right on the bus station where I needed to be and I passed my test anyway. So it was all all okay. No, it was my third job. At 19, I was already on my third job. Because that's the way it was in those days, you could leave one job and get another one straightaway.

I don't recall going to nightclubs and the women I worked with, two of them were in their 40s and married and Anne, although she was closer to my age, she was married, she wasn't gonna do the nightclubbing scene. But there were a lot of weddings and engagement parties and everybody went to them. It really was its own social club because it was that time in people's lives, such as mine, there was always someone getting married or having a 21st you know, whatever it was. So I mean, it was my 21st when I was at K&J and we did go out and a lot of people who came were from the office and whatever. But it was for special occasions, as opposed to, you know, just going every Friday or Saturday night. That may have happened but I wasn't part of that group.

My 21st happened to fall on a Saturday. So I was at work on Friday... and I know that we all went over to the Star and Garter. And I was absolutely steaming drunk because I was drinking vodka and blackcurrant. Oh god, it still makes me feel sick now. And people were just shoving over these vodka and blackcurrants. I was necking them because we'd only got an hour for lunch, and I fell back in the office. I can't remember being dressed up and when Roy and I got married, I wasn't working there anymore. So I think that they did you know, if there was someone getting married, they'd make a veil out of somebody's net curtains and they'd sit there with them on their head in the morning and the desk would be trimmed up that sort of stuff. But yeah, there was always a flow of collections because somebody was getting married or somebody was having a baby or someone was getting engaged or it was somebody's 21st.

So it's very weird, when I look back at it from today and think of the different places and how the workplace has changed over the years, for women, over that 40 year period, oh god I'm ancient! And it's unrecognisable because although it did, you're quite right, it employed a lot of women, but they were all in the lower level jobs. But there was also a large feeling of bonhomie amongst the people who worked there. I think when I started,

you know, if you didn't work at K&J, you knew someone who did. And people who worked there, enjoyed working there.

But when you look back you sometimes think, how? Because it was so male dominated. So undiverse, completely undiverse. When you think about West Brom culturally now it's a lot different to look at, you know, the diversity in West Brom now, to what it was then. But I don't recall seeing any Black people working in the offices there at all. But it was of its time. It's not an excuse. It's just, it was of its time. It would be interesting, wouldn't it, if you could sort of recreate its own image, but by today's standards? I just wonder, I don't think it would be such a fun place to work? What goes well with health and safety and diversity also takes away that natural, what it is, that cultural aspect of: its us against them, you know? The bigwigs, the men, and for some that wanted to be the bigwigs, but the women seem to - god this sounds terrible - know their place better, and had a better time because of it, if that makes sense?

Sophie
Well, I guess because they couldn't have aspirations?

Karen
They couldn't have aspirations. So they didn't. But they worked at a place that paid

decently. Working conditions weren't horrendous, certainly not in the offices, they'd got state of the art processes for goodness sake! The toilets were old fashioned, but the heating worked. So for such a big employer, it did kind of look after its staff, as long as you stuck to the rules set by the men, if that makes sense?

Sophie
And from what you're saying, I'm presuming that the women weren't unionised, or were part of a union?

Karen
Not that I recall at all; we certainly weren't in the offices. As I say, when they took us down to a four day working week, we just had to choose which day we weren't gonna work. I don't know who organised or set it up but I think it might have been Mr. Hugh's way of cutting costs, and we just did it. You know, but I was still living at home then, so I hadn't got a mortgage or babies to feed. It might have affected others differently. But yeah, they chopped it down to a four day week and that was it. Until they got their books balanced a bit better.

But it was all right that the owners had got more money than us. They inherited the company, I think from their father and built it to what it became. Funnily enough, many years later, as recently as 2013,

I went to work for another family business, JCB. And it was like time had stood still, it was like K&J all over again because it was male dominated, production dominated. And it wasn't, you know, on the stock exchange, the family ran it. They wanted to and it's successful doing that, but you've got to put up with their rules and conditions. So funny that some things haven't changed as much, though they do have HR and they do have policy. But you know, only when it suits.

Sophie
Yeah. And it's still hereditarily passed down, which sometimes just doesn't work for a lot of businesses, or will keep them successful.

Karen
Exactly. I mean, when you see the building now, it's not very often I go through West Brom now, but occasionally I do go and I look up, because our offices were over the main door into the left as you're looking from the street, up on that first floor. I'm glad I worked there because I had a really good time, I learned a lot and funnily enough, you don't realise what you learnt about who you are as a person until you've left a place. But I worked with some really good people. As I say, Molly was a fantastic, fantastic lady and Supervisor. She never used any position of authority to get you to do work, she got your

good nature, if that makes sense? Few and far between when they make 'em like that but I don't know if she's still with us now. I know she was up until about 5-10 years ago but she would be in her 80s now I would have thought, if she's still around. But Maureen also met her husband at K&J, she told us that he came in for a business meeting with one of our Directors and she'd seen him walk past in a suit and said to the girl who was working there at the time before me, 'I'm gonna marry him'. And she did. I don't know how, but she did!

They also had a pensioners' get together. I think it was around Christmas time with people who've done so many years of service and had retired. Down the corridor from where we were, on the right hand side, there was a much bigger meeting room that was very rarely used. They used to have like a luncheon put on, no expense spared for the people who no longer worked at K&J but had spent their working lives there and they'd come for a grand luncheon and if Mr. Tom or Mr. Hugh was around, they'd do a bit of a speech and they'd have a little get together. They didn't forget the people who worked there all their lives.

Sophie
So you said you went past the K&J building recently? Have you heard about what's going to happen to it?

Karen
They are not going to pull it down, are they?

Sophie
No, it's still a listed building. At least the front is. It's going to be turned into luxury flats.

Karen
Oh no. I just think, oh no, because they might turn them into luxury flats, but they won't stay luxury flats. It's not that kind of area. They will become tenanted flats. And I just think a building of such importance and such history for West Brom, I don't see why they can't turn it into a museum. That would be my thought, a working museum like the Black Country Museum but that probably wouldn't generate the same sort of money. I think it's very sad, if that's the case. I've got no problem with people building flats. But not there. No, because they'll destroy the interior.

Sophie
So that's the future of K&J! Yeah. It's quite sad, really. But I guess a workplace isn't necessarily the building itself; it's the people.

Karen
Well, that is true. And it really was. Those central stairs, I mean, really it wasn't a grand vestibule at all when you went through those big doors. Actually, the lift, your life was in your hands if

you went in that! We were only on the first floor. So it was, up, turn and you were there. I remember coming back from lunch one day and I think I'd been watching the Wizard of Oz on the weekend and I was singing to myself, as you do. I'm singing 'If I only had a brain' I was going up two steps and coming down one. And it wasn't till I got to the first bit of the landing, and turned around and there was Mr. Tom standing there. And he was just watching me. And probably looking at me as if to say 'whose this idiot?'. Because I was just amusing myself! And then you went to the right and there was reception, which was a nice reception, but it wasn't a grand, ornate entrance really, as I recall. But very happy days. I'm glad I worked there. Met a lot of people. Learned how to blag, learnt how to stand up for myself...

Sophie
What would you define as work?

Karen
Work is work. You go to work to do a job and get paid. It's always been 50/50. You work, they pay you. If something causes that balance to break, like you don't work, or you work a lot, and they don't pay you right it becomes something else. But to work is a way of life, for me it's the life that you got to work, to live. There are others who live to go to work. I know there's a difference. I've never been

asked that question before - what is work? It's life. I'm still working, Can't see a time I won't be. Because it keeps your brain going. And you meet people and you learn things. So it's all of that. I'm still learning, mainly about dog hair now, but I'm still learning!

Sophie
I've loved your stories. It's things that you just wouldn't know and we'd never be told. It's all the anecdotes that don't get recorded.

Karen
Well you've the official photos. And then you've got the story behind the scenes. And the official photos, obviously, is a snapshot in time of a pension do or a Christmas do or a Jubilee do. One of the significant memories for me is that they all came outside for just an apprentice, just a young lad who died tragically. And they stopped the business so that they could pay their respects as the funeral cortege went past. So it really was a magical place in that respect, despite itself, despite it being a product of its generation, you know in the 70s with, you know, hierarchies and bullies and things. But the people were fabulous. They really were.

Well, salt of the earth as we used to say, but I'm sure every town has its own equivalent, but it's such a shame that yes, I know the world has changed

and big printing companies are not needed now. Everything's digital. But it's a shame that they've done nothing. Turning it into luxury flats, I say it's tongue in cheek! I'm sure there's better things they could do with such a building, but I'm not in the town planning department am I?

Sophie

Yeah, it is a shame. And it feels like a missed opportunity, really, isn't it?

Karen

I think so. I really do think so. To think thousands of people have gone through those doors over the years.



NIM

Nim Patel was born in Kenya and grew up in Darlaston. She worked as an Outworker at K&J in 1986 and so did her sister. She was interviewed with her son Manesh Patel who grew up in West Bromwich.



Nim Patel with a vintage K&J greetings card.

Nim

We used to do the birthday cards and Christmas cards. And just, you know, they used to bring the box and we used to pack them at home with glue and stick-em. A temporary job. We used to do that two days in a week because we had small kids at home. And you have to do about 8 or 10 boxes, and it was loads, we'd have to do. It was hard work with the kids and we used to get about £8 a week, you know?

Sophie

Oh wow, £8 a week. So was that not a lot of money then?

Nim

Well at that time it's not because it was about 1986 - something like that.

Sophie

And so how did you get the job?

Nim

We applied in the office, asked like 'do you have any vacancies?' and that's how I got it. So they used to bring the boxes at home and we used to pack, you know, like with glue and all that. They told us how to do it, you know?

Sophie

So did you ever get to go into K&J or was it all external?

Nim

I didn't have to go in there. No. Not us.

Sophie

So were you classed as a casual employee?

Nim

That's right. Yeah, that's just working at home.

Sophie

And did you prefer to work at home? Was it all mainly for childcare reasons?

Nim

Yeah, something like that.

Sophie

And when did you stop working there? Was it just for a year?

Nim

Yeah. They used to give us a couple of boxes when Christmas comes. They used to bring it for us.

Sophie
And so I think Manesh (her son) said that you did it with your sister?

Nim
Yeah, that's right. My sister. We used to share it. She used to do two days and I used to do two days, because we have small kids at home. So we used to share it.

Sophie
Did you enjoy the work?

Nim
Yeah, we did enjoy the work. You know, it was hard work because it's a lot of cards you have to do, you know, you have to glue them. And you have to fix them properly. And then you pack them and when the next Friday comes you have to be ready by then.

Sophie
So were you based in West Brom at that point as well?

Manesh
Yeah we were living at Chapman Street.

Nim
Yeah, yeah, I think it's a long time. ever since 1976, we used to live in Chapman Street. When did we buy this house?

Manesh
2013

Nim
Until we bought this house, we used to live in Chapman Street

for a long, long time. I'm still in West Bromwich but we moved to another estate now. After the kids grew up, I used to work in the factory working for G.E.T (Great Eastern Trading) in Middlemore Road in Handsworth.

It was a part-time job, because you have to just drop the kids at school, and you have to come back home. You have to do it like that. You know, it was a hard time, that time. I could never even remember until *Manesh* told me, otherwise I'll never remember anything like that, nowadays! Different time now.

I used to have a couple of Indian friends years ago, who worked at K&J. Now, I don't know where they are. And they used to work in the factory full-time, but I don't see them at all no more. I don't know what exactly they used to do. I never went inside. So I'm not really sure about that.

Sophie
And did you prefer to be at home really doing the work there and them coming to you and dropping the stuff off?

Nim
Yeah, at that time, I didn't mind working at home because it was an enjoyable job. Because you don't have to go you can save time and look after the kids. And yeah, it was good. I wish I could still do that job!

Sophie
What would you define as work?

Nim
Oh, it's nice. Yeah, the work is work. It was really nice. Like I said before, like, you know, really, I mean, I wish I can still do that kind of job now, you know, because I'm still a strong woman! I'm 69.

Sophie
So would you like to do other stuff outside, like now in your retirement?

Nim
I don't think so. Because I look after the grandkids now. Different kind of work! I mean at home I can do it? You know? Nothing like the cards thing because I still remember how to do it, you know?

Sophie
And what does work mean to you?

Nim
I think it's really nice. I think I really enjoyed it myself. And my sister used to enjoy it. And I mean, at that time, it was a lot of money, £6 or £8, how many you used to do, you get that much money, you know because we think it's for the kids that we can buy them something, you know? It gives a lot of money at that time.

Sophie
What would your main 'tool' be?

Nim
I just like to, you know, to wash everything in the house, clean everything and see. I like to cook different things and that's one of my hobbies now. It's just the family now isn't it? You need to work for the family now at home. That's what I'm doing now. That's all I can say.

Sophie
Was it you that kept the cards or *Manesh*?

Nim
I kept them in my house but *Manesh* remembers everything, because he used to pile them up and everything. That's why I remember.

Manesh
My mom is a bit of a hoarder. So she probably had some stuff whereby there were errors on them. And they were considered waste. And those are the ones that she kind of just kept at home. And like we said in our last call, we used some of them up to give to our friends at Christmas. But there was some that I kept historically. For a future occasion, like today!

Sophie
And so you'd use those cards to send to other people? And yeah, as a keepsake. A nice record of your time there. And now it's led to this!

I also previously interviewed Nim's son Manesh Patel on his mom's working life. Extract here:

Manesh

I used to see these brick brown boxes getting delivered and I never really understood what was going on. But obviously, it was convenient for my mom because it was probably not having to go into a factory and work certain hours; you could actually do it from home while still cooking, cleaning and helping out with the kids. So it was convenient for my mom because my dad was working nine to five.

My mom was actually born in Kenya and my grandfather was born in India. They came over to England when they were quite young. And so my mum had a short period of time in education here. And once she'd got married, it was kind of like fitting jobs around the childcare. So this sort of work would have been ideal. But it was only probably during peak times that you'd get the work.

Sophie

Do you know what she did between those times? Like did she take on other work outside of K&J as well?

Manesh

There was some jobs, we were still relatively young. My mom had four boys, so had her hands full! And that meant that the bulk of the time was at home

looking after the kids doing the pick ups and drop offs. But as we got older, and maybe my older siblings were able to look after me, I was the third in line, mom was able to then work in jobs whenever she could get work really, because you know, having been born in Kenya and been brought up in India, her first language wasn't English at the time. So it might have been difficult for her to get a professional job. But those sorts of jobs helping out in factories and shops was certainly, you know, things that she could do.

So it was kind of like as we got older, she was working part-time. But then eventually got a full-time job once we were sort of settled into school, and she worked at an electric factory, not too far from Middlemore Road near the West Bromwich Albion ground... and probably worked 15 years there, but in between was doing odd jobs. Until she retired and that was it.

She started to get like a frozen shoulder from doing manual labour. Yeah. So as a result of that, she was almost forced to retire at an earlier age. I think she would have liked to have carried on, not necessarily just for the financial means but the social interaction with others. But the manual labour meant that she couldn't carry on working with her shoulder.

Mom doesn't live too far from myself. The next street down so we do see each other regularly. She's now busy looking after grandchildren!

I think the opportunity to work from home and bring some money in would have been advantageous without compromising the kids. So I think from that perspective, that would have been ideal. But obviously, it's probably dependent on workload, because if the factories got people there to do it, then they would obviously be the first people to turn to; it's only when there was a higher demand that you then may have to seek seasonal workers more.

Sophie

Was more precarious for her? Why do you think that was?

Manesh

Yeah, I don't know the circumstances in which they worked. But there may be a cultural fit, for example, in certain companies as well. And you might be more inclined to give certain people the job who are working from home who maybe don't have to interact. You know, there's less of a requirement for the language skills as well. So, for that reason my mom might have been in a position where she can work from home but not necessarily physically in the building. But, obviously, once she became more confident with language skills, she was able to get better jobs, but at that

time it was probably suitable for where she was in her life.

So once she became sort of more confident with the language, she, you know, enjoys the interactions. And now she is obviously fluent - she's got a Black Country accent now! So it's okay for her now. Obviously, when she first came across, she might have found it a bit difficult and this sort of job would have helped.

Sophie

Was your aunt also born in Kenya?

Manesh

Yeah, so they both came across. My grandfather actually worked in the shipping industry and he got a job in Kenya, from India. And then when they were quite young, I think the British Industrial Revolution was taking place here and there was a need for a workforce to support those factory jobs. So then I think in Kenya, maybe there was a lot of the subcontinent population that came over, got almost told to get out. So, because it was a British colony, you know, it was like, well, we need the workforce, you can come over. And then my grandfather came over first on a ship.

He originally got settled in Darlaston not far from us and then the family came over afterwards.

Sophie
And what did your grandad do?

Manesh
He was a toolmaker by profession.

Sophie
So he could get a job straight into the factory? Did he like it?

Manesh
Yeah from memory, you know, he enjoyed doing it at home as well. He had the tools so he managed to get a job there. And then, obviously, my parents came across, my mom did. But they came on a boat and it took several days from what they told me with literally just a picture of my grandfather.

Sophie
So they just had a picture? Did they know where he was?

Manesh
They knew where he'd be at the port.

Sophie
That's scary, isn't it, if they didn't find each other? And then did your mom meet your dad in the UK?

Manesh
Yes. So my mom went to a school called Kings Hill in Darlaston, got to a certain age and then she'd got to get into work and start bringing some money in. And not long after that got married and then they had the four of us! It's actually going

to be my mom's golden wedding anniversary this year, in July, 50 years!





Margaret Hannah Wimbury.

LISA

Lisa Harris grew up in West Bromwich. Her nan, Margaret Hannah Wimbury, worked as a Cleaner in the Envelope Factory and as an Outworker at K&J between 1976-81. Her mom also worked as an Outworker and Sarah supported her mom and nan with the outwork.

Lisa

My nan, she was a Geordie and she was Margaret Hannah Dishman in the beginning. She was a cleaner who she worked at the High Street site. And she worked in K&J, presumably doing the envelopes and she did envelopes with my mom at our home address. And there was a room full of envelope boxes. You couldn't get into one of the rooms for them.

Sophie

Was it called outwork?

Lisa

Yes, that's right. Yeah, that would be about 1980, 1981 time, because I was about 10. You know my age now!

Sophie

And so she would be at home, what would you do with the envelopes?

Lisa

She was sort of like opening the flap? And she had about 10,000 to get through in about a couple of hours. And they have to ship them back and get some more. And they were always to and froin' and you only had a certain amount of time to

open these envelopes. So they must have been timed, so they had to get them out. But my mom helped her as well. But I can always remember boxes and boxes in the front room. It was different envelopes. I don't know what they did with them or whatever.

She started in 1976. But I believe she was working at the two K&Js at the same time. She was working at the High Street as a cleaner, because I can remember my grandfather waiting in the car for her till about seven o'clock at night because it was dark and she used to come scuttling out of the main entrance. And Lyndon, she worked in there as well for a time but I don't actually remember how long she worked there. Or when she finished working there. I can always remember the lights being on and you could see the actual printers from the outside which was when the High Street was decent! (laughs)

Sophie

So was she cleaning in the day and then going home?

Lisa
No, because she had four children to look after as well. She did that in the day. She did daily work. And then she went and did cleaning jobs. Obviously, from about five o'clock till seven and then the weekend she'd work in the Lyndon factory.

Sophie
Wow. So she was just working non-stop.

Lisa
Yeah, she was. She was a strong character. Very strong character. She died at 87 but she never, never gave up. Never weak.

Sophie
Always doing something or keeping busy?

Lisa
Yeah.. Well, four children must have kept her busy!

Sophie
Yeah, Did she raise you well? And did all the housework?

Lisa
That's it, yeah. Yes. I live in the house. I bought the house and I've lived here 50 years. Went in at three days old when my nan and grandfather rented the house from the council. But I've never lived anywhere else. Always in the same house. So yeah, it's been a journey.

She'd have come straight home [after work]. Because when

that work ended, she would have started her other job. Yeah, it was difficult. I helped as well. Because there was a time where I was off school for a year. I had brain surgery. And I was at home, so I was there helping as well.

Sophie
So you're an unofficial employee as well!

Lisa
Yes. At the age of 10! (laughs)

Sophie
So did you know other people that worked at K&J, or your mom's and nan's friends?

Lisa
Yes, my next door neighbour. There was my uncle's sister, Maureen Bridge that worked there. I think she worked at the main building. I don't actually know what they did because I couldn't get any information out of them! But yes, one or two. One seemed to know the other and then, used to be like a family - family clique. You know, they used to get one person, who used to get another one involved and another one. Know what I mean?

Sophie
Lots of generations ended up working there.

Lisa
That's right. Yeah they all knew each other.

Sophie
And so your nan obviously worked multiple jobs, she also cared for you and raised you? How do you think she felt about that?

Lisa
Well, that was the era you know, it was - she came down here in the Second World War, which wasn't easy. Met my grandfather, got pregnant, he then moved to Malta for two years because he was in the Navy. I think she lived in a one bedroom flat for a time with my auntie, who's now passed away. And she had a difficult time because it was - my auntie was a baby that wasn't planned, it was taboo in them days. So my grandfather's family really didn't get on with my nan at all. But she... It was difficult for her, very difficult. And then my grandfather came back and they had more children and here we are. You know, so, it was very difficult. Because the times were, there was no washing machines, you know, whether it was towel nappies, it was boiling them... it was very difficult for women in them days.

She was juggling this and juggling that. I think that's what made her such a strong person. Because it was just, she had one baby, then my grandfather was away and then came back and then another baby. And then the last one was 10 years. A big gap.

Sophie
Was she able to meet her support or friendship network through that other job? Because I guess your nan would probably do the same for them, like you help each other out?

Lisa
Yeah, definitely. Because I mean, when you don't, when your family are not present, it's your friends that you rely on, and they basically become your family. So the K&J people from there would have become her family.

And she just didn't have a lot of joy. She didn't have enough money. You know, money was very sparse in them days. So she enjoyed what she could, when she could, reading and things like that.

I think it was the recession at one point. I can remember going up to Midland Bank with her once and she tried to get some money out. And they said, you haven't got anything in there, to get out. And we have to get straight back home. It was quite a time, we couldn't even afford the bus fare. Just about 10 pence at the time, it was difficult.

Sophie
How do you think she felt about that when that was happening?

Lisa
Awful. Because, well, we came up here to get some money out the bank. And then when you're

told you haven't got any, you know, what do I do now? You know, let's just go straight back home.

Sophie
Despite doing so much work as well.

Lisa
That's right. Working so hard. With children. Three jobs. Well, basically, you know on the go, just... yeah.

Sophie
Yeah. And I guess when you went to school, did she take on other kinds of work? Or was she still doing the same?

Lisa
It was the same, it was. She'd work in the day, she'd take me to school and then go to work. And then at night she used to work as a cleaner... it was a difficult time. And it was probably beneficial to them because they could do flexible work like that, in their own time [as an Outworker].

Sophie
Because I bet there weren't many jobs where you could have that flexibility and work from home. I guess you just have to do it in your own time and you get family members to help you.

Lisa
That's right. Yeah, I can remember all of us being in the front room. Boxes like skyscrapers.

Mom would go and collect them in the car. And there was another car that they used as well. Two cars used to go. And they used to pile them into the back of the car and be off, do the job, then go back again. It used to be sort of like, twice daily that they used to be going to and fro...

Sophie
What would you define as work?

Lisa
What would I define, you mean, in my nan's era, or both? Well, manual labour. It's hard, I mean, when I do work in reception, is it hard? It's just brain work, but when you work physically, manual, it's even harder. So when me nan was a cleaner, she was physically working, where I can just sit there, you know, on my bum, you know. She was up and down, round and about. So that's, yeah, I'd say physical...

My nan did what she had to do. So, you know, I mean, she gave birth to four children. And she and my grandfather's wage wasn't enough; she had to go and get other jobs as well. So she had to do what she had to do.

Sophie
How would you define work for yourself?

Lisa
Well, I've always sat at a desk, you know. I worked for a construction company for 21 years.

I mean, I work in admin and HR. And you know, it's interesting, but I'd probably pick something else. You know, after thinking about the more interesting things and that.

We have to work. In today's society, I'm luckier than most. I mean, I bought my house straight out. So I haven't got a mortgage, the bills, you have to keep going. You can't think, I'm going to retire and I'm gonna have lots of money, not in this day and age. Definitely not. You know, you've got to at least do something. When you can't even rely on your pension anymore. So it's endless, I can't even say I'm going to retire at 65, it could be 75. You can't just start again, it's what you have to do, but I can't see being able to stop, especially in this area. Especially with the electric and the gas, it's phenomenal. You can't really predict what's going to happen.

CARON AND JAN



Caron holds an old photo of K&J workers.

Caron O'Dowd grew up in West Bromwich and worked as a Tablehand at K&J from 1978-1987. She worked in different factory departments from Greeting Cards to the Envelopes Division at the Lyndon factory site.

Janet Taylor grew up in Walsall. She worked as a Tablehand in the Cards Division at K&J between 1979-89.

They became friends during their time at K&J and we interviewed them together at West Bromwich Town Hall.

Sophie
So what did you start with doing?

Caron
I worked in the Greeting Cards section.

Jan
Yeah. And it's nice, because there was a mixed age group. You know, a lot of young ones and a lot of the old ones mixed [together]. You know, the old ones would be sitting and doing the easy jobs.

Caron
Yeah, we would be doing machine work and that. Breaking out.

Sophie
What's breaking out?

Caron
Oh god. Worst job ever.

Jan
You knew you'd played up if you were on there!

Caron
It was basically on a platform. And it was all these cards. Set in like a big pile, were'n it?

Jan
Imagine like a sheet of card, they were all stacked up and inside like each sheet there was then cards cut out. So then you'd have to like count, so turn them and then you'd have to break all the cards out.

Caron
Break 'em out, but you used to cut your fingers and everything.

Jan
But they would give you gloves - if you wore em!

Sophie
And it's called breaking out! And so that was the job nobody wanted basically?

Jan
Yes because it weren't very nice.

Caron
It was horrible.

Sophie
And how long would it take to do?

Caron
There would be four of us, wouldn't there? One each corner.

Jan
There would be tubs and you'd break the cards out and then stack them in the tubs, ready for them to be folded on machines and they would be put on a pallet. And you had a platform. You could raise it up as you'd like. Because if the pile went down, you could raise it up. And then you have to break them all out. And then once you're finished, they'd be on the next one.

Caron
Yes, straight away, 'have you finished that?', and the next one would be on, wouldn't it? Didn't give us chance to let our fingers rest. It was a horrible, horrible job.

Sophie
How long were you in Greetings Cards for?

Jan
I worked there for nearly 10 years.

Caron
I worked there for quite a few years. And then I moved over to Business Forms because it was a

choice of being made redundant... It was in phases and I chose to move over to Business Forms, and it was shift work but I couldn't cope with the shifts.

Sophie
What would be the main kind of work? So you would have the breaking out and you also mentioned a glitter machine?

Caron
Oh, the glitter machine. I don't know how old you are, and you probably wouldn't remember. But years ago, I'm talking, you know, in the '70s on a Christmas, it'd be an advent calendar, but it would be a flat advent calendar. Just looks like a card. But then you'd have your windows to open, but we used to glitter it. It used to run through a machine, so it had been printed off and then you'd feed it through the machine. And then the glitter would cover over [the calendars] and you got covered in glitter.

Sophie
And so you said that a lot of women worked there? Did you also have women supervisors? And was it all kind of like you'd be working in different teams?

Caron
Yeah, it depends what job came available. And then who was free, they put you on there. But obviously they'd do a mix, they knew who to put on [what machine] to get the jobs done

quicker, if they needed to. Now there's the Longford machines, where it's like the cards are flat, you fed them into the machine and it folded it as it went through, and then somebody at the end would pack them all and then that's how they'd go out. And you could turn out that quick so the young ones would go on there to keep up, they wouldn't put the older ones on there.

They'd turn it up and you'd gotta be quick on the back! Because you've got to pack it in the box, seal it up, send it down the conveyor belt and the other person would just be there feeding them through the machine.

Jan
There was one lady she'd turn it up [the speed of the machine].

Caron
I used to have to work with her. I don't argue. I asked her to turn it down. I used to say, 'have you turned this up? Turn it down!'

Sophie
Would you be on that all day? So you'd have to keep up that pace?

Caron
Yeah. And then you'd see others sitting down for the break. And her, who I worked with, she just kept going. And I think they'm sitting down, having their break!

And they had the acetate machine, remember the acetate machine? You can't get them cards now, where it used to be a piece of acetate. And you'd be on a machine and it would fold the ends over. Then you get a blank card and you'd have to put the acetate on and glue it, for it to stick on.

Sophie
We saw some of the acetate cards. I think they might have been from the '70, '80s? Like, very of that time. Very distinctive, because you just don't get acetate cards anymore.

Jan
No. Well I think it was cards of 100 or something. So they'd feed them through and when you saw the white paper, you knew that was your 100. You'd have a strip of white paper, wrap it up and seal it and then put it in to stack up.

Caron
And that would go to the Outworkers.

Jan
Their job was to fit them on the side of the card and then glue it and stick it shut, and then count them, send them back.

Caron
And they used to bag them the Outworkers did, didn't they? So many in a pack remember? And then they put them in a cellophane pack and put a label on them.

Sophie
And so you said that you've worked around different departments as well. So you were in cards for a long time, then did you both move around?

Jan
I stayed in the card department.

Caron
Yeah, Janet stayed in the card department. I moved around.

Sophie
And where else did you work?

Caron
I worked in the calendars for a bit when they was, you know. short, because we used to collate. Do you remember the collating? We used to have to collate the calendars into their months and that, and then they'd send for them to have the wire put through. Yeah, so we used to do that. Do you remember the great big cards we used to do? In greeting cards, we used to bone fold them?

Jan
I actually bought one of the bone folders. Like you'd fold them over - your card - and make sure it was - you'd use that to crease the fold.

Caron
Yeah, and we used to do the really great big cards, you used to be able to buy them in the shops. The really big ones. But obviously they couldn't go on a machine because they was

too big. So we used to sit and use the bone folder.

Sophie
Where there any more skills that you learnt in the factory?

Caron
Fanning out!

Jan
Sounds bad doesn't it!

Caron
Fanning out, when you've got paper like this, can I use this? (picks up a stack of card nearby) And you'd have to go like that and fan it out. I don't know if I can still do it now!

Jan
You'd count them, like you flick them and then turn them over and you can count them better.

Caron
Yeah, you get the air in, you'd have to get the air in like that. And then you'd get your fingers and you'd fan 'em out, don't know if I've still got the knack, no!

Jan
No I'd have done it the other way, I'd have got that corner and slid that way. Now if you hold it like that, you get the air in, then turn it and then count them... And you know my mother-in-law had dementia and she'd still go into the office in the care home where she was and she'd still get paper and do that and tidy them up.



Caron in the "tub" for her wedding day.

Sophie
Some things are just so in your - like you said - the knack. Like the muscle memory doesn't leave you.

Jan
It's like if I'm going to go and buy a card now, I used to make sure it was all folded properly.

Caron
Yeah. You know, when they come off the Longford machine, you'd had to fan them out and see whether there's any big gaps. So where it ain't folded properly, and if you've just carried on and not noticed and

then all of a sudden, you're looking, you had to stop the machine and think 'oh'!

Jan
The machine would flick out so they wouldn't fold the cards properly. And if you didn't know, all those cards had gone through you'd have to stop it. So you'd get somebody in to maintain the machine to put it right again. And then them cards would be waste.

Sophie
So you didn't want to be the one on that machine!

Jan
So if it's going fast, yeah,
you've got to keep checking!

Sophie
So there was calendars,
cards...

Caron
Envelopes Division. Up by
hospital.

Sophie
So you worked there? But that
was for the shift work and you
didn't enjoy that?

Caron
Yeah, it just didn't suit me at
all...

Jan
And it wasn't always easy
working with the men. When
you think, like you're saying
there's women and the men
mixed, years ago, how women
used to feel uncomfortable,
because you did. Even walking
through where the men worked,
because you know, they'd stop
and look and you shouldn't have
to feel like that should you?

Caron
Yeah, but you know, it's ever
so funny. I keep dreaming about
K&J.

Jan
You want to go back? (laughs)

Caron
I keep dreaming about it. But
it's really strange because
I'm working there but I keep
forgetting to clock-in. So I

was working there and I weren't
getting paid. I keep having
that recurring dream.

But we had some good times
didn't we?

Jan
We did. Because like the
younger girls we used to go out
for a Thursday evening.

Caron
Yeah, we used to go out. We
used to have a limousine!

Jan
You won't know The Dilk that
used to be Aldridge way. We
used to go there, it's knocked
down now isn't it?

Caron
And The Three Crowns we'd go
to. But that's been knocked
down now too.

Sophie
So was it a good work culture?
Where you'd all go out together
and you'd get a limo!

Jan
With the younger ones, about 10
of us, wasn't it? It's where me
money went!

Caron
Was it The Stone Cross we used
to get in the limo? We used
to go and have a drink in The
Stone Cross you know, what's
the curry house now and then
the limo would come and turn up
for us wouldn't it?

Sophie
Was that regular? You'd just
get a limo?

Jan
We used to go out every
Thursday, but not every week
for the limo, probably once a
month - probably when we get
paid!

Caron
I wish I could remember how
much it costs.

Jan
I think it was someone to do
with someone we worked with
wasn't it? It was someone she
knew, so it might have been a
bit cheaper?

Caron
Yeah it might have been a bit
cheaper. But you know it's sad
as well that some of them that
we worked with have died now.

Jan
We'm getting old!

Sophie
It's so nice that you have
these communities that you meet
through work and you grow up
together in that job, don't
you? And yeah, go out together,
work together.

Caron
And whenever one of us was
getting married we used to have
like, it was like a great big
tub. Where you used to put your
- when you was on 'breaking
out' - your waste would go in
this big tub. So when you got

married, they used to put all
stuff in the tub and put you in
the tub and...

Jan
Dress you up! And push you all
down the High Street, all the
way around to the front.
Caron
And sometimes they'd throw
beans or something on ya!

Jan
You wanted to get married but
you didn't want to go work!

Caron
Yeah, I've still got the
photographs... But all me tights
was ripped, they'd put all
like this confetti stuff in my
tights.

Jan
And if you'd got a car, you'd
parked at the back, they'd do
all your car!

Sophie
Would it be during work hours,
so it wasn't too busy?

Caron
Yeah, it was, or dinner time,
when we was on our lunch, but
the gaffers didn't mind, did
they?

Jan
They knew it was accepted
there. That's what, well even
the men when they did their
apprenticeship, they used to
put them in the same tubs
and fill it with beans and
everything else. ... We had a
laugh didn't we?

Caron
Yes. Well, we had a laugh. I mean, you know, there was some horrible times, but there was some good times. You knew when one particular Director was coming around, everybody was like on your best behaviour and that; god he was a nasty man.

Jan
If he saw something out of place. It's like one of those that looked down on you.

Sophie
Did he come up very regularly?

Caron
Well, they used to say 'he's coming round!', and everybody would sit up! And you'd be scared to look at him in case he said something to ya.

Jan
I think it's nice, like you said, because the older generation we heard their stories when we were there. I mean, one lady, she was lovely, a funny, little lady. She used to shop, she'd catch the bus anywhere to get one pence off a pack of sugar. If it was 1p cheaper she'd go on the bus with her pass.

Caron
Lickey Hills and everywhere she used to travel.

Jan
I wonder how many bags of sugar she'd got at home. Yeah, it was nice, her sister worked there and friends. You always knew somebody there.

Sophie
And did you have family that worked there as well?

Jan
I didn't. But generally, most people did have somebody they knew.

Caron
I can say I've had some good times there.

Jan
Because I mean people stayed there for a long while. There had got to be something there, hadn't there?

Sophie
It sounds like you weren't being overseen constantly? Like a lot of workplaces they don't even have break rooms for you to socialise with each other anymore. Were there spaces that you could go to, when you went for a break?

Jan
No. Well, if you were at your break you had to stay on site, like we used to call them a tub, we used to stack on the cart and turn upside down, sit on that.

Sophie
I'm quite interested in what we think about work. What does work mean to you?

Jan
I just think, with work, you got to generally enjoy going. I could say be respectable, but not all companies do that, do

they - look after you properly?

Caron
Yeah, you gotta enjoy your job. Get on with the staff you know, make friends, get on with people. No bitchiness, you know what I mean?

Jan
Work together, basically.

Caron
Yeah, work together.

Jan
Look out for each other.

Sophie
What do you think your tool would be? I feel when people talk about tools, a lot of it's like, the men on the machines, but I think tools can be, you know, lots of different things that aren't just a physical thing. What do you think your tool personally would be?

Caron
Well, to get the job, right. Get the orders out on time. You mean that kind of thing?

Jan
I mean not everybody's going to be the same. So as long as you've got something to give, maybe? I think that's nice, whether you get it back is a different matter, but if that's the kind of person you are, I do love to give things and be kind to people.

Sophie
Which I think is undervalued.

And there's friendship as well, from what you've all spoken about. A lot of those friendships carried on post K&J and that's the legacy of it, not necessarily the cards or the things that you made and that was part of what you have to do. Yeah, but so much of it is the people we work with and if it's a good work environment.

Caron
Yeah. While there was a lot of older people [who] used to work there as well, you know, you could have a laugh with them. Even though they'd been there a long time. They didn't feel that they was any better than you

Jan
You'd come in hungover the next morning and then they would just think: that's just youngsters being youngsters, going out. You'd turned up for work, you're gonna do your work. So that's what you need to do, isn't it? You know, they were happy with that. They would talk to you about it. Like to know what happened. And we asked them about their grandchildren or husbands or wherever it was, so it was like a mix, it was nice.

Sophie
And do you think that they would cover for people? Say someone that comes in hungover and then that particular Director came round?

Jan
I think they would. Tell you to go to the toilet or something, you know? We'd look out for each other. Yeah, it was a big part of that.

Sophie
Would a lot of people go to a specific pub?

Jan
It used to be The Sandwell, then the Star and Garter would be on the other corner, like diagonal. What was the one just two doors from The Star and Garter?

Caron
The Great Western.

Jan
The Great Western. We used to have Buzbies, which was like a mini nightclub on the other corner, on the right used to be up there.

Caron
And Sandy's? Remember Sandy's nightclub?

Jan
Sparkles as well it used to be called.

Sophie
And would a lot of people go there after work and to the pub on their lunch break?

Caron
Lunch, because you could go and have - and not get drunk obviously - but you could go and have a quick drink and then

go back to work. Whereas that now, if you did that, you'd get the sack! But a lot ain't there no more, they've all closed down.

Jan
It's a shame they built over it [the K&J factory] - I know they did have to build new parts, but I think that's taken it away, hasn't it from the old part now? Instead of doing that up which would have been better. But that's what they call 'improvement' isn't it?



K&J workers on a night out, Jan pictured in centre.

YVONNE

Yvonne Farnell grew up in West Bromwich. Her mother joined K&J in 1969 working in the factory for over 25 years. Yvonne works as a Customer Service Officer for Central Library, West Bromwich. We discussed her mom's and her own working life, alongside the importance of library access.

Yvonne

My mom was named Margaret Paige. She worked at K&J and I vaguely remember that I was about 10 so it would have been 1969 and she had a 25 year service award with a gold watch with an inscription on the back with her years of service. And they always had an awards ceremony for things like that. And they were very kind to their staff. My mom worked on the printing of cards first. [K&J printed cards] for a design company called 'Rust Craft'.

They treated the staff well. They had regular Christmas parties and that type of stuff and they'd have trips, especially for the retirement clubs to Weston-super-Mare and Cheddar Gorge and places like that. There was a very strong sense of community with all the staff. Once you retire from K&J, you automatically went into the retirement club. You know, they used to have these social clubs there. And it was a family orientated firm really, kind to the staff and the staff were loyal to the company. So my mom enjoyed working, she

used to work five till nine because obviously I was young and needed looking after, my father must have finished work around four.

And if there was overtime available she'd work it because I wanted to go on a horse trip holiday from school because I loved horses and animals. And it was expensive because it was in Wales, and you've got to pay for a week's board. And she did overtime to save the money so that I could go. When I was a bit older. I'd meet her from work and she'd get off the bus and I'd walk her home. It was just a regular thing I did.

Sophie
When would that have been?

Yvonne
I'd say maybe the 1950s? Because she could have been there prior to 1959. Yeah. I don't know. You don't ask these questions to parents; you always think they're going to be there to ask. They're not. But she had fond memories, lots of friends that she maintained contact with well, after her working life, you know.

Sophie
What was her role there?

Yvonne
She worked on the high street within the factory premises. And they used to have the men to oversee the machines to make sure that they were running properly. I suppose things were rolling off? And she was always very good at collating papers. You could give my mom a big pile of papers like that and she'd collate them really fast. You know, it was obviously a trick of the trade, dealing with paper and card and you'd got to be fast. You get the knack. But she had fond memories, and she maintained contact with the people she worked with when she retired. Gwen and Marjorie, they both worked with my mom. And had a great sense of camaraderie, you know, with the girls, the ladies, you know?

Marge and Gwen would come for afternoon tea with my mom. I know she kept in touch with two particularly, and they would have their own little trips and visits as well. But they'd also go to the retirement club, they went to have cuppa tea and a chat. You know, it was a proper social event.

They used to do Christmas parties for the staff. They always seemed to be a good firm, with their people, their staff. Sort of like an entrepreneur type company, they were looking after their staff and they have

loyalty back. That's why people stayed so long...they were all like long service people, you know. It's a bit like libraries really, a lot of the staff - once the staff join up - you find people have done 20 years easily.

Sophie
Do you think your mom enjoyed work?

Yvonne
Yeah, she didn't come home and say 'oh I've had an awful day' you know?. No, she never came home and said, I don't want to go to work tomorrow. She never said that to me. She just went and did it. Just got on with it. But she never moaned or complained about not liking working there.

Sophie
Do you remember when K&J closed?

Yvonne
Not at the time, I just remember it just ceasing, just not being there. My mom was still alive when it had ceased trading. And she was sad about that. She said she had a lot of happy memories there... And it was a shame that they hadn't done anything with it. It's just got boards around the back of it really. She said it's a shame that nothing's being done with the building, even if it was a different type of usage.



K&J Anniversary Programme.

CLAIRE

Claire Boddy grew up in West Bromwich. She worked as a Payroll Clerk at K&J from 1987 to 1995. Her cousins also worked at K&J.

Claire

I started at K&J in 1987. I'd left school and K&J was the place to work in those days. Everyone knew someone who worked there so I just went and put my name down on a list. And then I had a call to go in as a Payroll Clerk/Trainee Accountant. So that's how I started.

Sophie

And so how long did you work there for?

Claire

I was there from 1987. And then in 1994, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and I was off work with long term sickness and then they made me redundant. And then a year later, once I got my health sorted, I then went back to work there because my friend, Denise, she'd left and I replaced her and I took over her job. Then I was only there for a few months and I left again because they were closing and then they were just leaving my managers [and me] to do the payroll.

[When I started] I kind of floated around because they wanted a Trainee. I was only 17, well I was still 16 at

that stage when I went to work there. So I trained in like credit control, purchase ledger and accounts and in payroll. So I had a few months in each area. I was based in the Payroll Department then, but still there to help out if anyone needed any help anywhere else.

Sophie

Do you think the company changed a lot in that time?

Claire

It did, yeah. I was kind of there to the end really, doing the payroll. Because we worked quite close to people in personnel, you kind of had the inkling that something was happening. But obviously they had the other part which was the Envelopes Division. Which I did go back and help, kind of casually, with the manager of Pensions and Payroll Department, and did some work down in the Envelopes Division as well. I've just thought about that, after the West Bromwich one had closed down.

[Payroll] was more to do with credit control and things like that. It might have been like auditing a few things. Part of it did move to Hilltop and

I did go and work there, just again casually, moving with my boss previously at the West Bromwich branch. But again, it was more just payroll or because we had a Calendar Department at one stage. Yeah, where they printed the calendars and things, so it was a lot to do with that as well.

Sophie
Did you have a lot of involvement with other departments? As someone in payroll did you deliver the pay cheques?

Claire
Yeah, we took around the wage slips but also the Calendar Department got really busy towards Christmas, so there was always overtime [you could take] there. So I'd go and work in the office or packing calendars and things of a weekend. There was always something to do. They were really busy.

Towards the end, you could see that they were selling off different departments and reducing staff. The Directors as they got older, they were all ready for retirement. And there wasn't anyone really to hand the business down to. I mean, I know a couple of the Directors passed away. And they were quite old then.

Sophie
And then they didn't have a successor. How do you think it impacted people?

Claire
Well I know at one time, K&J was like the place to work. I mean, I had quite a few family members working there in various departments. And I know they earned good money as well. And obviously, then they lost jobs, I think it did have an impact because it was one of the big companies within West Bromwich wasn't it? And obviously, to the customers who used K&J as well, you know, like the different printing firms that we used, or they bought from us.

I know a lot of other companies then kind of poached some of our staff - a lot of printing companies.

Sophie
So what family members did you have that worked at K&J?

Claire
So they were cousins and they were all of the same family. There was one worked in the offices and then another two worked down on the factory floor.

Sophie
Is that how you got the job?

Claire
No, no, it was just, I think it was just coincidence, that the day I went and put my name down, was the day that they'd put out an advert for a Payroll Trainee. And I think I just fitted the criteria and they called me for an interview. I

mean, obviously, I knew of K&J because of family members who worked there. And I know it was more of the people you know, not what you knew [to get a job].

Sophie
What was K&J like as a workplace? What kind of experience would you describe it as?

Claire
I've got to say - more for the staff who I worked with, I suppose - those years that I worked there, they was my best working years ever.

It was like a community you know, you got on well. And to be honest, the company was good. You know, they always looked after you at Christmas. There was, we'd got quite a social life within our department as well. So yeah, like I say it was one of the best places I've ever worked. It was a shame [it closed].

It was my first job. And I grew up there with the people I worked with. Now I'm still friends with five or six of them, Denise being one of them, and we still meet up, you know, once every couple of months or so. I think people seemed happy in their jobs.

Sophie
Do you think it was the work? Or do you think it was more the people?

Claire
I suppose it could be a bit of both. I suppose it depends what department you worked in and different people who you spoke to. Me working in the Payroll Department, I got to see everyone who got paid a lot more than me (laughs). Every payday, I used to get quite frustrated! But, just everyone who you met, they were always quite happy to chat. And I don't know, it was just, it was enjoyable to work there. And it was a good atmosphere, it meant you enjoyed the work that you were doing as well.

Sophie
And do you think that was cultivated more by your colleagues as opposed to management creating that atmosphere?

Claire
Yeah, I kind of feel that management kept themselves to themselves, you know they've got their Directors' Corridor that you didn't really go down unless you were senior management. So you didn't get to see much of the Directors really. It was more the colleagues who I worked with.

Sophie
So you said you got frustrated on pay day? Because you could see who was getting paid more? Was there quite big differences in who was getting paid?

Claire

Yeah. And I think because there were people starting after me, who were getting better pay than me, I think that was frustrating.

Sophie

Could you ask for more money or is that not really the thing that people would do?

Claire

I think you could have done and I did a few times. I went there straight from school; I suppose you call it an apprentice these days, whereas people were coming in from university with degrees. Not necessarily anything to do with printing or anything to do with the job that they were doing. But obviously because they had got the degree they could get more money than what I did, which kind of frustrated me a little bit.

Sophie

So you mentioned that you would socialise a lot together? What kind of things?

Claire

We might go out for meals, we'd go bowling, we went canoeing. Just different things to try and socialise more out of work. We went to some of the pubs around West Bromwich every lunchtime. But then it'd be further afield of an evening because to be honest there wasn't much going on around there at that time.

Sophie

How do you think it was that you met together at K&J and have then continued this friendship? Why do you think it's been able to carry forwards?

Claire

I think one thing, obviously, having something in common. And, you know, people that we all met there you've got that conversation that you can have all the time. But I think we all just clicked as friends. You know they are like friends that you can talk to about anything really. We've been friends for 30 odd years, it's a long time isn't it? And we've always got that thing in common, of K&J which now it's not really that relevant anymore? Whereas, you know, our lives have just led different paths, but we've all just stayed together and stayed in contact.

That made me remember that on a Friday afternoon we'd go to the pub: The Sandwell, on the corner in West Bromwich and then we'd come back and there used to be a little newsagent shop over the road. And I'd go over and get two bottles of wine and hide it in the money sack and we'd bring it back in and we'd drink that on a Friday afternoon as well. That was kind of a regular thing.

Sophie

So would you have a secret swig from the bottle or did you have it in cups?

Claire

From the coffee machines that used to have the plastic cups that came out. So we'd get a coffee, tip the coffee away and then just put in wine in there. It was Thunderbird in those days!

Sophie

And would you go out after that?

Claire

Sometimes of an evening but that would not be with K&J people, I'd then go home and then go out after, back into West Bromwich again.

It was great in those days. You know, it was just pubs. And then there was a club that opened over the road from K&J, I think on Victoria Street called Jazz, it was like an indie type of club. And you could stay in there to half past four [in the morning], on a Friday or Saturday night. So most of my time I'd spend in the Star and Garter in West Bromwich, and then I'd go out to Jazz and stay there till like four, half four.

Sophie

And what about in the Star and Garter, would that be because a lot of K&J workers would go there?

Claire

I mean, when I went on a Friday and Saturday, I didn't really see anyone from work. I think they probably went at lunch times. But it was a jukebox those days. So it was all, whatever you put on in the jukebox, but it was a good atmosphere in there. Everyone was friendly, there was never any problems. We just enjoyed ourselves. And then either go to, there was a nightclub, I think it was called Tokyo Joe's at one stage? It's had different names. And then onto Jazz.

Sophie

And was it a big workforce at K&J when you were there?

Claire

It had got to be about 400 people in all. And with the Envelopes Division as well.

Sophie

Was your department having to do the payroll for all 400 employees?

Claire

Yeah. There was three of us, well four of us at one stage, and then it went to three of us. And then to two and then to one!

Sophie

Did it feel like it was all just coming down around you?

Claire

Yeah, I mean, I left when I knew what was going on, really.

I wanted to get a job before it was too late. So I just went to work at the AA in the end, for a short while. Because the opportunity came along, the job was offered to me, so I took it. I didn't want to wait until it had closed and then I was searching for a job with no money.

Sophie
Have you been back to West Brom recently?

Claire
Well, my parents live not far from West Brom, near Dartmouth Park and I'm not far from there myself. My daughter works in West Bromwich at the minute. I don't frequent it that much because it's not a place where I'd like to go very often to be honest anymore. But then there's the new area, isn't there? Is it New Square? So if I go anywhere, I just pop in there. My daughter works in one of the shops there.

Sophie
What do you think has changed about West Brom since you've been there?

Claire
Well, for one it's like the high street shops. I mean, when I worked in West Bromwich there was a Marks and Spencers. There was all the top shops and things. Whereas now there's hardly anything there... going there now, it's like a different place. You know, it's not like it was, you know it

was busy. There was hustle and bustle everywhere. Whereas now it's just the odd market stall here and there and not much else.

I just think people have moved on to be honest. Moved out the area. I think there was a lot of unemployment as well which didn't help and the cost of living for people. I think people go to places like Merry Hill, which is not that far away. Or the bigger shopping centres instead of shopping on the high street like they used to.

Sophie
Have you seen the old K&J building recently?

Claire
I heard at one stage they were going to turn it into flats. I mean, one thing that always stood out for me was the lift in there. The old fashioned lift; when you walked in the main entrance, the lift was there in front of you. And that was something that always stood out for me. Because I haven't seen one anywhere else. And there was one in the main entrance and then one down in the floors, as they called it, where they stored different things. Because I used to have to go down and get clock cards and stuff. But they've got the two there. That always stood out for me. And I always thought if I did something with it, I'd like them to have kept that lift, because I think it's part of the building.

Sophie
What would you define as work?

Claire
Work to me is obviously something we have to do to earn a living. But it's something that I think you need to find that's rewarding for you. I work in a store now. So you know I've took a completely different path... I think it's down to money, isn't it really? We work to earn money. But it's also the relationships between people at work as well though, I think that helped a great deal. But if I didn't get on with anyone at work, I think I'd have to leave regardless of money.

HANDS IN THE ARCHIVE

"We used to be able to look through the windows and watch the men using the machines so you could stand on the high street watching people working inside K&J; I think it was the printing presses and things like that. That was when I was very small!"

- Jane Talbot

Following its closure, thousands of archival documents and images created throughout its history, the majority of which are of workers at K&J and celebratory events, were donated by the owners and family to the archives in the late 1990s. We wanted to include a number of these images but unfortunately we were not granted permission and have been unable to share them in this publication. All the archival materials originating in the K&J collection were created by the company. There is always power in archives; these are contested spaces and often the voices and narrators which thread within them are those that have agency and power.

I do not believe this was a deliberate refusal; often contacts for these permissions become out of date as time passes. Due to the nature of copyright ownership, members of the Kenrick and Jefferson

family still have rights over these materials. It is a reflection on how the official narrative of working class people's lives still remains under the influence and control of powerful figureheads.

Archives are not neutral. They are embedded within structures of power, tied to colonial and imperial violence and practices. Often collections relate to who can afford to collect and preserve. We need to consider how an archive was obtained, who has access or is excluded from it and who are the gatekeepers of them.

"To trouble the archive or to awaken its content towards alternative versions of history seems especially important when dominant histories aim constantly to rewrite the past."

- Andrea Luka Zimmerman

How can we trouble an archive? How can we collectively expand on who can collect, has access, who has ownership and who distributes? Archives are often positioned as fixed singular objects or pasts, rather than fluid, evolving and multiple objects and stories. Throughout the book, I wanted to depict people in the archive, images of hands on the materials which were part of their lives. Hands in

conversation with the archive, presenting it as a movable, multitudinous object. Images which can be continuously re-read and contextualised, a living object:

“‘Living’ means present, ongoing, continuing, unfinished, open-ended. The new work which will come to constitute significant editions to the archive will not be the same as that which was produced earlier, but it will be related to that body of work, if only in terms of how it inflects and departs from it.”

- Stuart Hall

This is a project rooted in social and local history. Social histories exist and live beyond official depictions and collections. They inhabit the spaces inbetween, in the tea breaks sat on upturned tubs, in the pub at lunchtime, at the kitchen table... They live on in the relationships formed and maintained well beyond their time at K&J and these are the memories and stories that should be shared.

The archival images are available to book to view at the Sandwell Archives. Please visit: www.sandwell.gov.uk for more information.



Nim and Janet holding a newspaper clipping of Janet and other K&J workers in the 1980s.

ACCESS TO LOCAL LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

This project would not have been possible without access to local libraries and archival services (which are often attached to libraries). These services steward local collections and give access to local and community histories. Increasingly they are under threat and austerity measures have led to massive funding cuts since 2011. Recently it was announced plans to cut £1.5m by the end of 2026 in the region, prompting fears it could lead to the closure of 14 libraries across the Sandwell and Dudley boroughs and effectively reducing libraries and archives services by 30%.

A library's role has considerably evolved over the past century and since West Bromwich library opened, it has become a communal and warm space. Often having to fulfil multiple needs within the community to plug gaps in services which have since long been cut - such as community centres.

The union, Unison, stated that funding cuts "will jeopardise the educational development and cultural life of the Borough for decades to come" (Express & Star). Libraries and archives serve multiple social

functions beyond the scope of their remit. Following protests and the campaign 'Save Dudley Libraries', in June 2023 the council acceded and kept libraries open until funding reviews in 2026. Without protests and public campaigns such as these, libraries across the region (and the UK) are continually under threat of funding cuts and closure. It is vital that these services remain accessible and open to all.

I spoke with Yvonne Farnell who is a Customer Service Officer at Central Library, West Bromwich about her relationship to work and the importance of Library Services in the area:

Sophie
What would you define as work?

Yvonne
Well, you spend a lot of your time in work, don't you really? So you want to enjoy what you do. You know, you're lucky if you enjoy what you do; there is a lot of people that work and they don't like what they do. Because you have to earn money to pay the bills, don't you? And you want a quality of life where you can do things rather than just exist, you know? Whereas if you're on benefits,

you're just existing really aren't you? You haven't got any extra to do anything. So I consider myself fortunate that I'm still working. I don't take it for granted. But I suppose really people work to pay for their bills and if you do like what you do, then that's a bonus. But a lot of people have to work and they don't like what they do. But they still have to do it. So I'm lucky because I do enjoy my job, it can be quite challenging sometimes here, the different situations we come across but I enjoy my job, even if we have some challenging days sometimes.

Sophie
I was thinking a lot about how work is often associated with tools. What do you think your tool is?

Yvonne
Communication skills. When people come in, they don't always explain to you what they really want. So it's like being a detective sometimes you say, 'well, is that what you want? Or do you think it's this?'. And then you sort of, it's just like a question and answer to find out what that person really wants. Because they don't always explain what they want, first of all. I can't think of an example, but there are lots of times where people come in and you think it's one thing that they're asking for but then when you start asking a few more questions, you find

that it isn't that at all. It's something else they want. So communication skills are really important. And you have telephone inquiries that can be unusual. You know, you have to pass them onto the right department if you can't answer it. We get lots of unusual questions. But it's sort of getting the answer right for people really. So communication skills, friendliness. A lot of people come in and we might be the only person they see all day. A lot of people come in at 9.30 in the morning, and they don't go till six o'clock at night. And they use our warm space hub and chat to us.

Sophie
When did you start working in the library?

Yvonne
Well, I started 16 years ago, 2006. But originally, I started in libraries as a young girl, when I was 18 in 1978, and I worked at Smethwick library. For about, oh gosh, about 10 years, and then they had a dry rot problem in the building and we had to move. I moved here actually, temporarily. And then I worked at Hampstead library. And then when I had my family, I left and I had a 10 year gap. And then I came back into libraries. So I've been a long term library employee since I was a young girl.

Sophie
How did you get into it? Was it more than just an interest in reading?

Yvonne
Yeah, well, I love books and I love meeting people so it's an ideal job! here's lots going on in libraries. You know, we're like a social hub now. We're not just about books, we're IT help; computer help; warm space hub. We help a lot of people with social problems, we guide them and send them to the right people. We've had a lot of homeless people here, we've helped people who are refugees, we've helped and sent them to food banks. So you know, we have a lot of challenging situations which you wouldn't think in libraries, but we do it and we help people. So it's not just about books really. It's helping the community now.

Sophie
It's a social service isn't it?

Yvonne
It is really; we are really almost like a community centre in a way.



Screenprinting workshop at Stirchley Printworks remixing K&J personal archival materials, 2023.

COLLATING HERSTORIES

“It’s nice that you’re doing this now. Like you said that it was like a workforce of women, you know, just cracking on and doing what they had to do. And it’s just nice that you’re able to create this legacy for them.”

- R. Porter (their mom and aunts all worked at K&J)

“I can tell you that when mom worked in the big office with the other girls, they all used to stand in the window at a certain time in the morning, because all the West Bromwich Albion [football] players used to go into the shop opposite to get the morning paper, and then get on the bus up to the Albion Ground. They all used to stand and wave at them!”

- Jane Talbot (mother worked at K&J)

While collating these women’s stories, integral to their experiences was the memories and friendships formed of the people they worked with. The legacy of their working lives is the lifelong relationships they formed.

It was never the bricks and mortar of the factory site which, as workers, they maintained and cleaned, or the products they printed, assembled and packed on site or

at home. It was always grounded in their interactions. The positive experiences women shared of work were always centred around the fun they had together and the care they showed each other. The memory of K&J to them is the friendships formed in tea breaks, at the pub, gossip during work hours. Of the repurposing of factory waste or ‘chads’ as confetti when celebrating each other’s life milestones. Together they forged relationships which could transcend work, gender roles and hierarchies.

Having space to reflect on how we define ‘work’ is one which comes with privilege. We rarely have a choice in whether we can work or not; we have to work to pay the bills. Work should never be what we define our lives by. Whilst the firm fostered some of the camaraderie between workers, particularly through their celebration of workers’ achievements and the retirement club, there was a clear class divide and examples of contempt shown by some of the Directors towards staff. However, this did not cloud or dampen people’s experiences of working there. As workers they were able to define themselves and their relationships with each other

outside of the workplace. It is the cultures which workers cultivated for themselves, both at K&J and beyond, that have continued to thrive.

“I think it’s interesting, because the idea of work and the concept of work has changed drastically over time. You know, in my mom and dad’s time, it was kind of like, you get a job, you get married, you get settled. And I know that when I was at college, it was like you’re good at typing, so you’d be a secretary. And then I fell into law. And now I’m a freelance artist, and I’m the brokest I’ve ever been, but I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. And particularly with the pandemic as well, work has completely shifted. And I think people are kind of realising that mental health and all of that is just as important as, you know, than getting up and going into work every day. I have been a freelancer for a few years now. For me, work is doing it for myself and doing things that make me happy every day. I know money is very important, very important. And unfortunately, the world doesn’t go around without it. But you know, if I wanted to make money, I’d still be working in law. So that’s what it is for me now.”

- R. Porter (mom and aunts all worked at K&J)

Whilst currently working class people have to work, it is

important that we are able to reflect upon and expand the definitions of what work is, how we do this work, where this work takes place and who must do it. Articulating this can ensure that voices often sidelined in this process are heard and their work and roles acknowledged, remunerated and more equitably distributed.

Life and work outside the Directors’ Corridor was in stark contrast to the majority of people that worked there. Whilst the official archive is still in the hands of the Kenrick and Jefferson families, the ‘story behind the scenes’ of the generations of people who worked across the firm is the lasting legacy of the company. This legacy ripples on beyond the Kenrick and Jefferson dynasties, beyond the building and beyond the official archives.

“It really was a magical place in that respect, despite itself. Despite it being a product of its generation, you know in the 70s with hierarchies and bullies and things. But the people were fabulous. They really were.”

- Karen Radburn (K&J worker)

K&J was the site which brought people together but it was never the basis or foundation on which those relationships have lasted. Those relationships have surpassed ‘work’ altogether.

Sophie Huckfield (2023)



K&J Workers, Nim, Janet, Caron, Wendy and Patricia, 2023.

Thank you to all the
collaborators on this project.

Researcher/Local Historian
Mike Fenton

Interviewees

Claire Boddy, Denise Burton,
Yvonne Farnell, Lisa Harris,
Geoff May, Caron O'Dowd, Manesh
Patel, Nim Patel, R.Porter,
Patricia Price, Karen Radburn,
Jane Talbot, Janet Taylor,
Olive Timmins.

This project has been funded
by Historic England through
their Everyday Heritage Grants:
Celebrating Working Class
Histories.

A huge thank you to Arts
Council England and Sandwell
Council for their continued
support of Multistory.

Workshop participants

Wendy Hood, Donna Martin,
Gillian Miller, Caron
O'Dowd, Manesh Patel, Nim
Patel, Patricia Price, Jane
Palfreyman, Judith Palfreyman,
Janet Taylor, Jill Turner.

Project support

Multistory

Emma Chetcuti
Rene Francis-McBrearty
Caron Wright

Stirchley Printworks

James Turner

*Sandwell Community History &
Archives Services*

Georgia Bould
Maureen Waldron

Central Library, West Bromwich

Yvonne Farnell

MACE Archives

Benjamin Reynolds

Historic England

Katy Hoskyn

Oak House, West Bromwich

Workshop space host

A project by:

Artist: Sophie Huckfield
Project Manager: Jess Piette (Multistory)
Project Volunteer: Tilly Holland
Design and printing: The Holodeck
Texts, editing and design: Sophie Huckfield
Audio work, editing, music composition and production:
Dr Natalie Hyacinth
Audio work narration: Emma Purshouse

The views expressed by the project participants in this book are their own and not of the artist nor Multistory.

Sophie Huckfield

Sophie Huckfield (she/they) is a cross-disciplinary artist from Walsall. Her research-based practice is political, collaborative and combines social engagement to challenge and repurpose narratives used to frame specific stories, myths, histories, futures and experiences that connect to themes around work, technology, craft, social-class, intersectional feminism and (de)industrialisation. When developing work Sophie incorporates layering and cutting as a conceptual and aesthetic tool, drawing on archival and research materials to develop multidisciplinary works which move between video, sculpture, installations and writings.

sophiehuckfield.com
@sophiehuckfield

Multistory

Multistory is a community arts organisation. We have been based in the borough of Sandwell since 2006 and the people and place shape our work. We work with a wide range of communities, creatives and partners to reimagine the local area, platform under-represented voices and inspire creativity and social change. Our programme of participatory arts projects, workshops, talks and events takes place in libraries, community centres and indoor and outdoor public spaces. The stories told through our projects have a local resonance but are also seen by audiences far beyond, both in national exhibitions and through our digital programme. We support creatives through collaborative projects, employment, bursaries and skills development opportunities.

multistory.org.uk
@multistory

Dr Natalie Hyacinth

Dr Natalie Hyacinth is an Artist and Researcher on the ERC Sonic Street Technologies project based at Goldsmiths, University of London. Natalie's research is intersectional and interdisciplinary, incorporating themes from Cultural Geography, Black Studies, Philosophy and Afrofuturism. Natalie is a founding member of the Black Music and Cultures Research Group London that seeks to centre Black female writings and thought on diaspora Black music and makes and thinks about sound as part of the Sonic CyberFeminisms Collective. Natalie's art explores electronic sonic worlds, creative works she makes under the name The Black Astral.

Emma Purshouse

The narration has been read by Emma Purshouse who is a Wolverhampton based performance poet and novelist and the first Poet Laureate for the City of Wolverhampton.

The Holodeck

The Holodeck is a printmaking and design studio founded in 2013, in Birmingham, specialising in Risograph printing, Letterpress, bookbinding and traditional printmaking techniques.

theholodeck.co.uk/

Accessibility

For an alternative format, please get in touch with Multistory at: info@multistory.org.uk

Image Credits / Sources

Historic England Archive:
Aerial View of Kenrick & Jefferson (AP140711)
K&J original factory site illustration from the House of K&J book.
Janet Taylor: Newspaper clipping and bone folder.
Olive Timmins: 'Girls Corner' K&J staff news booklets.
Patricia Price: Dressed up at K&J for wedding photograph and payslip, 1968.
Wendy Hood: Dressed up at K&J to mark her engagement. At K&J's between 1967-72.
Paul Swift and Ann Kelly Moran: Photos of the Star and Garter pub 1960s
Nim Patel, Manesh Patel: K&J Cards.
Lisa Harris: Photograph of Margaret Hannah Wimbury.
Caron O'Dowd: Photographs at K&J's.
Geoff May: K&J Women's ball invitation.
Sophie Huckfield: Workshop photos at Stirchley Printworks and Oakhouse, 2023.

Project References

The Black Country History archive: www.blackcountryhistory.org/
Media Archive for Central England (MACE): www.macearchive.org/
The Sparrows' Nest Archives: www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/

Suggested Reading

Natural Enemies of Books: A Messy History of Women in Printing and Typography
Edited by feminist graphic design collective MMS: Maryam Fanni, Matilda Flodmark and Sara Kaaman

See Red Women's Workshop - Feminist Posters 1974-1990
By Jess Baines, Susan Mackie, Anne Robinson, Prue Stevenson

Heart Of The Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain
By Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe

Living a Feminist Life
By Sara Ahmed

Black Country Working Women
By Clare Wightman

Women, Race and Class
By Angela Davis

Transgender Marxism
Edited by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke

Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive
By Alana Kumbier

Disability and Labour in the Twentieth Century: Historical and Comparative Perspectives
Edited By Radu Harald Dinu and Staffan Bengtsson

Constituting An Archive
By Stuart Hall

Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment
By Matrix

Published by Multistory Editions
All rights reserved © Multistory, 2023

Printed in Birmingham, UK by The Holodeck
Typeset in IBM Prestige Elite (body) and Memimas Pro (titles)
Paste papers for covers by Joseph Lilley

ISBN: 978-0-9955062-9-9

Limited First Edition of 300
of which this is copy:

/300



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Funded by
Historic England

ISBN 978-0-9955062-9-9



9 780995 506299 >

